THE Freeman

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

JANUARY 1965

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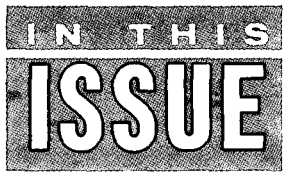

✓ The "great society," suggests the Reverend Mr. Opitz, will come, not from seeking it, but as a dividend of living our own lives in a truly human way ..... p. 3

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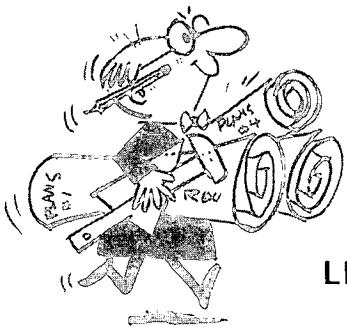
EDMUND A. OPITZ



LET'S NOT SAVE THE WORLD!

STATUS QUO is a Latin phrase meaning, in a modern translation, "the mess we are in." A great number of our contemporaries must understand it so, because never have so many persons and organizations come forward with such a variety of schemes for reforming other people and improving the world. This is the age of the Man with the Plan. The reformer, with his blueprints for social uplift, is in his heyday.

I suppose that I too would be classified by some as a reformer, for I travel around the country making speeches and taking part in seminars. And the gist of what I have to say is that, indeed, things *are* in bad shape, but that they might be improved if we approached economic and political problems in a different spirit. If the distinguishing mark of a reformer is his yen to save the world, then I am not a reformer – *in this sense*. The principal reform I seek is the reformation of reformers! But I live close enough to the tribe so that many of them send me their literature.

Across my desk come the outpourings of many earnest souls, offering salvation to the world if only the world will embrace their particular panacea. The panaceas peddled by these folk come in all sizes and styles, ranging from world government to a low cholesterol diet. In between are the socialists, the land reformers, the money reformers, the prohibitionists, the vegetarians, and those who believe that the world is in the strangling clutch of a far-flung conspiracy of sinister men who operate anonymously behind the

The Reverend Mr. Opitz is a member of the staff of the Foundation for Economic Education, Book Review Editor of *The Freeman*, lecturer, and seminar discussion leader. This article is from an address before the Montreal Dental Club, October 28, 1964.

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scenes. As I read this material, I am thankful that the world has so far refused to let itself be saved on the terms each and every one of these reformers lay down. These people differ wildly among themselves as to the details and precise nature of the remedy; but they are in basic agreement as to the general pattern reform should take. Reform – as they understand it – consists of A and B putting their heads together and deciding what C should be forced to do for D. William Graham Sumner said something like this about a century ago, which means that this reformist mood has been with us for a long time.

People Are the Basic Ingredient

Every reformer, presumably, yearns for the good society – however much reformers might differ among themselves as to the earmarks of the good society and the appropriate means for reaching it. Each reformer is confident, however, that all we have to do is install his machinery and utopia will arrive tomorrow.

But in his preoccupation with the apparatus for making society over, the reformer omits one important factor from his calculations: he omits people. It is the people comprising a given society who make that society what it is, and it is they who distinguish it from other societies made up of people of a different sort. Chinese society is unlike Hindu society; and how different is each of these from Western society as we know it in New York or Montreal! The characteristics of a given society are derived from the nature of its people; a society is warlike if its members are belligerent; an agricultural society is one in which people are farmers; a society whose members go down to the sea for trading or fishing is a maritime society; and so on.

It follows from this, that a good society is not to be achieved by any kind of social apparatus or political machinery, however elaborate; a good society is the happy by-product of good people functioning at par, and it comes about in no other way. If you have good people – defining "goodness" so as to include a modicum of intelligence – a good society follows automatically. But without the right kind of people, a good society is impossible.

A Parable

Let me, at this point, offer you a little parable. This story has to do with a bright boy of five whose mother took him to a toy store and asked the proprietor for a challenging toy for the young man. The owner of the shop brought out an elaborate gadget, loaded with

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levers, buttons, coils of wire, and many movable parts. The mother examined the complicated piece of apparatus and shook her head. "Jack is a bright boy," she said, "but I fear that he is not old enough for a toy like this."

"Madam," said the proprietor, "this toy has been designed by a panel of psychologists to help the growing child of today adjust to the frustrations of the contemporary world: No matter how he puts it together, it won't come out right."

The world never has come out right, despite the best efforts of countless men, but this very fact incites every new generation of reformers to even more frantic applications of their esoteric cures. Utopians, dreaming of an earthly paradise, have drawn up their blueprints for a heaven on earth, but in practice, every attempt to realize a perfect society has resulted in an intolerable society. Newfangled heavens on earth—as exemplified in the totalitarian countries – resemble nothing so much as the old-fashioned hell.

My idea, on the other hand, is to seek – not a perfect society – but merely a tolerable one. If we cut our garments to fit the cloth and work toward a tolerable society, we may yet achieve it.

In other words, I am deeply distrustful of any and every "perfect" solution for social problems. Human life, as a matter of fact, is not a problem to be solved; it is a reality to be lived.

I am defining the reformer as a type of man who is determined to save the world, even to the point of disregarding the wishes of the people involved. His opposite number is one who believes that people have a right to live their own lives, and that when their lives are lived in a truly human way the good society will appear as a bonus or dividend.

Three Reformers

Reform is in the air in the modern world, and most of us absorb some of it through our pores by a kind of osmosis. The average man, whenever anything goes wrong, says, "There ought to be a law...." But the reformer mentality is best understood by examining several fully developed examples of this type of mind.

American politics for more than a generation has been dominated by the New Deal-New Frontier-New Republicanism psychology. As the proponents of this doctrine view the matter, society is to be masterminded by a political quarterback calling plays from Washington. Join scientific humanism to majoritarian political processes, they say, and achieve peace, progress, and plenty. One of the lead-

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ers of the early New Deal Brain Trust was a professor of economics named Rexford Guy Tugwell, who poetically acknowledged:

I have gathered my tools and my charts;
My plans are fashioned and practical;
I shall roll up my sleeves –
make America over.

Somewhat earlier, there was the philosopher and educator, John Dewey. Dewey introduced many changes into the curricula of our schools; he is thought of as the godfather of progressive education and the classroom emphasis on adjustment to the group. But more fundamental than even these things, Dewey was a prime mover in the installation of a new *Weltanschauung*. John Dewey worked out a major reconstruction of philosophy, life, and society, and himself best articulated the new mood and temper which he championed. This new outlook, in his own words, "marks a revolution in the whole spirit of life, in the entire attitude taken toward whatever is found in existence." What is this revolution? It is "a change from knowledge as an esthetic enjoyment of the properties of nature regarded as a work of divine art, to knowing as a means of secular control. . . . (Nature) is now something to be modified, to be intentionally controlled. . . . Ideas are worthless except as they pass into actions which rearrange and reconstruct in some way, be it little or large, the world in which we live. . . . Modern experimental science is an art of control."

Carry this matter back to the middle of the nineteenth century and we come to the man from whom so many twentieth century problems stem – Karl Marx. The determining factor for men, Marx wrote, is "the mode of production in material life." A man's very consciousness is determined by his social existence. "Men's ideas," he added, "are the most direct emanation of their material state." The logic of this is fantastic, for according to Marx's own statement, he himself is a mere mouthpiece for the material productive factors of 1859; Marx's mouth may frame the words, but his mind does not generate the ideas. The ideas come from "the mode of production in material life."

Marx does not stop here; he goes on to fashion an idol. Declaring himself an atheist, he excoriates those who do not "recognize as the highest divinity the human self-consciousness itself." This new mortal god has only one obligation to the world: Change it! Aristotle's god, the Prime Mover, derived esthetic enjoyment from contemplating the world he had made; and many philosophers, and ordinary folk as well, have enjoyed

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the starry heavens and the glories of nature.

But if Marx were to have his way, such pleasures would be prohibited. "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways," he wrote; "the point, however, is to *change* it." (1845) A contemporary of ours, Bertram Wolfe, writing critically of Marxism, gives us this interpretation: "History was to be given a new meaning, a new goal, and a new end in Time. . . . At last man would become as God, master of his own destiny, maker of his own future, conscious architect of his world."

From now on a kind of activism will take over in human affairs. Everyone is supposed to be doing something all the time. In the United States, if anyone wants to apply a withering epithet to Congress, he calls it "a do-nothing congress." We are so busy acting that we have no time for thinking. We don't much care where we are going, just so long as we can get there in a hurry. With the result that nearly everyone is afflicted with a bad case of the jitters. The mood of our time may be summed up in one word – disenchantment. The recurring theme of our literature is "alienation." Modern man, who should be the proud, upright lord of creation, has to be kept going by increasing doses of aspirin, tranquilizers, and psychoanalysis. We're in the position of the man riding a tiger; we don't like the ride, but fear we'll be worse off if we dismount. We know there's something wrong with us, but we've learned to live so well with our illness that we're afraid the cure would kill us!

Letting Things Alone

Well, what's the alternative? The journal with which I am associated is called THE FREEMAN. Between 1920 and 1924, the editor of THE FREEMAN was a unique personality named Albert Jay Nock. Associated with Nock was a group of young writers such as Suzanne LaFollette, Van Wyck Brooks, and Lewis Mumford. Someone remarked to Nock, "You've done wonderful things for these young people."

"Nonsense," said Nock, "all I've done was to let them alone."

"True," replied his friend, "but it would have been different if someone else had been letting them alone."

Letting someone alone is not the same thing as doing nothing. It requires great effort on the part of parents properly to let our children alone, so that they will grow up, not as carbon copies of ourselves, but as their own unique personalities.

Rightfully letting things alone,

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in statecraft, is Edmund Burke's policy of "a wise and salutary neglect." But it is to medicine that we must turn for the clinching illustration of this technique.

Certain medical theorists of about a century ago examined the human organism and found it a crude contrivance of pipes, tubes, levers, and dead weight. This botched mechanism could be kept going only if someone constantly patched and repaired it. Writing of this antiquated medical theory, an historian says: "This held that the body was a faulty machine and Nature a blind worker. The student made an inventory of the body's contents and found, as he expected, some out of place, some wearing out, some clumsy makeshifts . . . and some mischievous survivals left over." Medical practice, based on this theory, was to interfere with the body's working by probing, operating, removing, and altering. The practice often proved disastrous to the patient!

Medical theory has changed in the past fifty years. The modern theory, according to the same historian, regards the body as "a single unit, health a general condition natural to the organism . . . and the best diet and regime, to live naturally." This new theory regards the body as a self-regulating, and for the most part, a self-curative organism. It need not be interfered with except to repair or remove an obstruction that prevents the free flow of the healing power of nature. Medical or surgical ministrations do not create health; the body does that of itself if let alone.

The new outlook in medicine is summed up by the title of a famous book by Harvard professor, Walter B. Cannon: *The Wisdom of the Body*. I believe it was Dr. Cannon who introduced the concept of "homeostasis," the idea that the human body maintains all the balances necessary to health unless something interferes.

Freedom in Society

There is a striking analogy between present-day theories of health and the ideal of freedom in human affairs. The believer in freedom is one who has come to the realization that society is a delicately articulated thing, each part depending on every other. Hence, arbitrary interference with anyone's peaceable willed action not only diminishes the freedom of the person restrained but affects all other men in society. The attempt to masterplan society upsets the balance which every part of society naturally has with every other part.

Nearly everyone favors freedom in the abstract. Most intellectuals champion freedom of speech, aca-

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demic freedom, freedom of the press, and freedom of worship. The only freedom which is everywhere under fire is economic freedom. Why is this? Following the analysis I have been using, it is self-evident that those who would deny men freedom in the market place assume that, in the absence of political controls, economic life would be chaotic. Karl Marx indeed did speak of the anarchy of the free market. The assumption, in other words, is that manufacturers would not produce the goods consumers want unless government stepped in and told them what to make, and in what sizes, styles, and colors. The assumption is that farmers would grow nothing but weeds and brambles unless crops were assigned and acreages allotted. The assumption is that the vast transportation industry — which can jet us across the ocean, take us by rail or bus wherever we want to go, provide us with millions of automobiles — would still be using wheelbarrows and the oxcart if government did not direct it. Merely to state these assumptions is to expose their absurdity, but we have to go one stage further in order to make the absurdity manifest.

What Is Economics?

Why is there economics, and what is the economic problem? On the human side of the economic question is man, a creature of insatiable needs and desires but with only limited energy. On the other side of this equation is the world of raw materials. Very few things in their natural state can be used or consumed directly; human effort must be expended on them in the form of the work required to grow, manufacture, or transport them. Raw materials are scarce, relative to human demands for them, and finished products are even scarcer. And this means that there will always be unsatisfied human wants; people will always want more.

For a thing to qualify as an economic good, two requirements must be met: the item must be needed or wanted and it must be in short supply. Air, despite the fact that it is necessary to our lives, is not an economic good, for it is not in short supply; under normal conditions there is enough air for everyone and lots left over. But conditioned air *is* an economic good, even though it is not necessary for life but only ministers to our comfort. Conditioned air is in short supply, there is not as much of it as people want, merely for the taking, and so they have to pay for it; that is to say, they have to give up something in exchange for it.

Economics, then, is the disci-

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pline which deals with goods in short supply; and the problem it faces is how to allocate scarce goods so as to best satisfy the most urgent human wants. The free market approach to this problem is to rely on the individual free choice of consumers, as manifested in their buying or abstention from buying. The buying habits of people form a pattern which tells entrepreneurs what to produce, and in what quantities, sizes, and so on.

This is the tactic of liberty as applied to the workaday world; this is the market economy, or the price system, and if government merely protects people in their productive activities, and in their buying and selling – protects them by curbing predation and fraud – the economic activities of man are self-starting, self-operating, and self-regulating. The free market is the only device available to men for allocating scarce resources equitably; its performance is so efficient and so intelligent that it has excited the admiration of those who have studied and understood its workings. Virtually every one of the charges that has ever been directed against the free economy proves, upon examination, to be aimed at a problem caused by some misguided political interference with the free economy.

In the United States, no one likes the term, socialized medicine, but there are many people – including some doctors – who support a thing called Medicare. The professed aim of Medicare is to increase the availability of medical and dental services, and Medicare seeks to do this by political interventions and subsidies. Now medical and dental services are in short supply, relative to the demand for them. This is to say that medical and dental services are economic goods, and – because they are scarce – a way must be found to allocate them. The free market is the only efficient and fair way to allocate scarce goods, and therefore the free market can be relied upon to furnish the greatest quantity of high grade medical and dental service at the lowest possible price, to a citizenry which has a great variety of other needs and desires to satisfy as well. Every political alternative to the market means a wastage of economic goods and resources; it means less for all.

An Orderly Universe

Examine any area of life you wish; events on the surface may not appear to exhibit a pattern, but dig deep and you find order, harmony, and balance. This is a *uni*verse we live in, not a *multi*verse or a chaos. The discovery of

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orderliness in nature together with better means of cooperating with that order has resulted in the great progress of the natural sciences during recent centuries. The human sciences and the social sciences are somewhat more complex, and therefore we have a little more trouble in these areas. For thousands of years we have known what we *ought* to do in the moral and spiritual dimensions of our lives, but we find it difficult to perform as we should at this level. Man likes to think that he can "get away" with things, and so he ignores or defies the Purpose which manifests itself in and through the universe. The universe tolerates wayward man up to a point, but if man does not learn his own lessons from his waywardness, he is taught the hard way. "Things won't be mismanaged long," said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Victor Hugo in his great novel, *Les Misérables*, put the matter more dramatically. You recall his long description of the Battle of Waterloo and the downfall of Napoleon. "Why Napoleon's Waterloo?" Hugo asks. "Was it possible that Napoleon should gain this battle? We answer No. Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blucher? No; because of God! Bonaparte victor at Waterloo – that was no longer according to the law of the nineteenth century. Another series of events was preparing wherein Napoleon had no further place. . . . Napoleon had been denounced in the infinite and his downfall was resolved. He bothered God. Waterloo is not a battle; it is the universe changing front."

And so I say, Let's not try to save the world! Saving the world is God's job; our job – yours and mine – is to make the world worth saving. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Hot and Cold

THE STURDY INDIVIDUALISTS in the country who resent any political interference apply for it every week. The manufacturers, whom I will call the sturdy believers in private enterprise, think Government ought to keep out of it, are with us every week or with the Tariff Board every week or with something or other every week.

There is hardly a section in the community today that does not in one breath protest its undying hostility to Government activity and in the next breath pray for it.

Australian Prime Minister, ROBERT G. MENZIES,
before the National Press Club in Canberra, September 14, 1964

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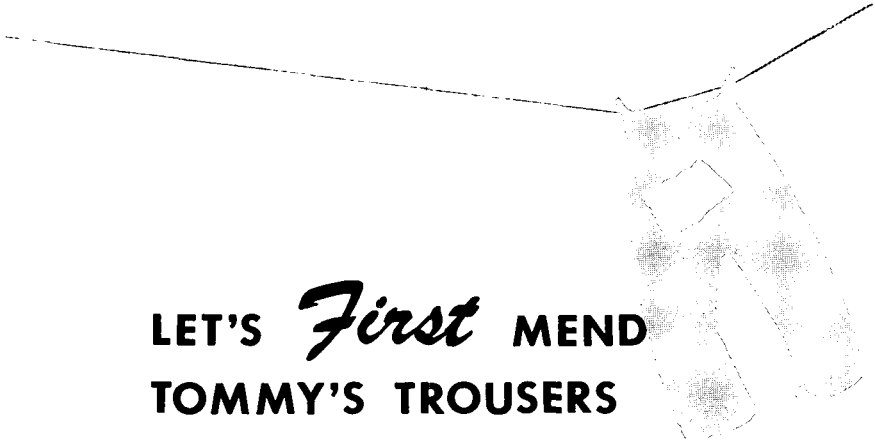

LET'S *First* MEND TOMMY'S TROUSERS

W. A. PATON

A STORY that was one of my grandfather's favorites, and which he enjoyed embellishing with local color and varying details, needs retelling. The yarn, in a nutshell, was as follows:

Little Tommy was out on the street, very dirty and with both the knees and seat of his pants in tatters. A passing neighbor, noting that the youngster's condition was somewhat more disreputable than usual, complained: "For heaven's sake, Tommy, why doesn't your mother mend your trousers?" To which query Tommy replied cheerfully: "Oh, my mother is too busy to do that. She's over at the parsonage sewing for the heathen."

The lesson to be learned from this miniature tale is quite obvious, but nevertheless seems to have been widely forgotten—along with many other pearls in our accumulated stock of common sense—at this juncture. The point to be made, of course, is the desirability of putting one's own house in order before tackling the chore of redding up either the place next door or a more distant establishment, at home or abroad. This bit of homely wisdom is age-old and is reflected in many familiar adages and admonitions that have come down through the centuries. "Let every man mind his own business" is the blunt and

Dr. Paton is Professor Emeritus of Accounting and of Economics, University of Michigan, and is known throughout the world for his outstanding work in these fields. His current comments on American attitudes and behavior are worthy of everyone's attention.

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restrictive way that Cervantes (and doubtless others before him) put it.[1] Biblical injunctions in this area range from the pithy "physician, heal thyself" to the striking and unforgettable "cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye."[2]

A Man's First Duty

The view that self-improvement comes before trying to remake the other fellow certainly has substantial merit, and straightening out one's own thinking and developing one's own character are such difficult and lengthy undertakings as normally to require many years of effort and growth – a lifetime for a lot of us, with the task still unfinished at the end. In other words, only a few ever reach the stage where they are fully justified in "telling off" the folks whose ideas and actions they regard as objectionable. Not many are truly "called" to this task.

This is not saying that all teaching and preaching activities should be condemned. Family conduct is closely related to individual behavior, and parents have and should accept the major responsibility for guiding the actions and molding the attitudes of their children, as well as taking on the humdrum job of providing food and the other physical essentials. Many persons are reasonably competent to give instruction to young or old in specific subjects such as algebra or piano playing.

But when we turn to the broad fields of economics, politics, and morals (to say nothing of sociology, and the burgeoning array of satellite pseudo sciences dealing with human behavior), the number adequately qualified to teach – or preach – is painfully small. Anyone has a right to offer his services in these difficult and controversial areas, in a free market, but it is unfortunate when an educational structure develops which in effect compels high school and college students to suffer under continuous dosing by instructors who have little more by way of strings to their bows than zeal for "social reform."

Group Reformation

The lesson may also be readily applied to group policies and actions aimed at inducing other groups, by persuasion or compulsion, to change their ways. The

[1] According to Bartlett, from Lockhart's translation. The only statement along this line that I have found in my old copy of the *Adventures of Don Quixote*, a translation by Charles Jarvis, is the following: "Let everyone turn himself round, and look at home, and he will find enough to do."

[2] See Luke 6:41-42, for the complete parable.

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outstanding current example, of course, is the massive "foreign aid" program of the United States, which bids fair to become a permanent millstone on the neck of American taxpayers. How did we ever get this way? As one looks over the prevailing landscape in this country, and takes note of the conspicuous blemishes and blotches, it makes the sensitive person cringe with embarrassment when he considers the pose we have assumed of Santa Claus and mentor for the whole wide world. Yes, we have attained a high level of material well-being, but what else do we have to crow about, especially now that our constitutional form of limited government is on the verge of going down the drain and a large part of our structure of liberty – freedom to assume responsibility and make decisions – has been washed away by the tide of socialist intervention?[3]

And look at the daily reports of increasing crime, including many grisly and terrifying cases (fostered in part by the prevailing policy of coddling lawbreakers, by social workers and the courts); the senseless slaughter on the highways (more than a third of all Americans who die between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five are killed in automobile accidents); the widespread outbreaks of rioting and looting, uncontrolled for days at a stretch; the growing swarm of rude, dishevelled, and otherwise obnoxious young people, to be found everywhere, and now conspicuously in evidence on college campuses; the contemptuous brushing away of moral standards, in all levels and sections of American life, including top governmental officialdom.

Strength Through Struggle

It's not a pretty picture, and as one contemplates the scene, he gets to wondering if affluence is superior to austerity as a condition for mankind, for the long pull. There is considerable evidence that the pinch of poverty has merit as a character builder. In climbing the slope and overcoming obstacles the human being often exhibits amazing courage, persistence, and resourcefulness. But when he gets to the top, has it made, he doesn't seem to know how to maintain either his energy or his integrity. At this stage he's inclined to forget the factors

[3] Almost everybody, including most politicians, still give lip service to "free enterprise," but the plain fact is that American business is seriously hobbled by an ever-expanding network of restrictions, regulations, and interferences, especially at the Federal level, and the mechanism of the market, indispensable to a free economy, is limping badly and no longer giving effective guidance in the utilization of resources.

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required for material progress, and look to government, "Big Brother," as a means of securing him in the enjoyment of his gains to date and at the same time providing more and more for less and less effort. Can the race stand prosperity? is a truly basic question.

In any event, it is quite apparent that the astronomical handouts of more than one hundred billions abroad during the past twenty years have not won us either the friendship or respect of the handoutees. They take our money, and want more; but they don't like us and they don't change their political and social views and practices to conform to those we are supposedly trying to export. And possibly one reason Uncle Sam's give-away program is a flop is that he doesn't have his own house in order, doesn't set a good example.

The foreign aid program is political, widely publicized, even somewhat patronizing. There is much accompanying talk of "underdeveloped," "backward" nations. If the folks abroad, in Latin America, in Africa, and elsewhere, find this annoying and become nastily resentful (to the point, at times, of offering violence to the giver), it should not be surprising. Perhaps there is something to be said for the ideas and ways of life of these "backward" peoples, including the remaining primitive tribes of the deserts, jungles, and forests, even if they lack automobiles, television sets, and central heating. Who are we to criticize and give way to the uplifting urge on the grand scale? Even if we assume that we are smart enough to run the other fellow's life as well as our own, isn't it a bit presumptuous to attempt this, particularly if the other fellow prefers to take care of his own affairs? Are we justified in interfering with the opportunity of others to realize the satisfaction that comes from accepting responsibility and climbing the slope in their own way?

The Helping Hand

Do these unfavorable comments on massive aid for the "heathen" abroad (and which are scarcely less applicable to governmental welfare programs and antipoverty drives on the domestic front) aim in the direction of condemnation rather than praise for the somewhat instinctive urge to lend a helping hand to a fellow man in distress? Was the Samaritan of the famous parable on the wrong track? Having spent a substantial number of years of my life in a primitive farm community, where the helping hand was much in evidence, in the form of par-

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ticipation in barn raisings, husking bees, threshings, and so on, as well as in connection with specific accidents, fires, and other misfortunes, I can't escape the conclusion that there are circumstances under which the individual may properly render assistance to neighbors – and strangers, too – and to that extent interfere in their affairs.

I recall the time that I was driving the nine-mile trip to town with a team and bobsled, hauling a 5,000-pound load of baled hay. Snow was deep on the road, and there had not been much traffic since the last fall. As a result, probably, of a mite of careless driving, a runner went down in a soft spot and all the bales of hay, and myself, left the rack and were piled up every which way in the deep drifts along the road. Reloading 200-pound bales under these conditions is difficult, and I was much pleased when Irving Abbott drove up behind me and helped mightily with advice and muscle. (In this case, Irving wanted to get the road unblocked as well as to help me out.)

Six Suggested Requirements or Limitations on Aid

Giving counsel or other assistance is ticklish business, and if aid is to be constructively helpful, without bad side effects, there are severely limiting factors to be observed. First, aid should generally be on an individual rather than a group basis (although private association activity need not be ruled out); second, it should be strictly voluntary, not given at the point of a gun or under compulsion by government; third, it should be welcomed, if not actually invited, by the recipient; fourth, it should be related to specific difficulties and distresses (such as the personal example just recounted) and should not become continuing, habitual; fifth, wherever practicable the kind deed should be in the form of the needed service or goods (for example, helping a neighbor to repair tornado damage to his home, or providing emergency shelter); sixth, in general the giver of aid should be in close contact with the distress he is trying to relieve, or at least be familiar with the facts. Under these specifications the helping hand can be defended. But aid so restricted is a far cry from contributions to all sorts of domestic or distant "reform" and "welfare" programs and causes, about which the giver has no firsthand or dependable information as to nature or accomplishments. Aid to others in this framework, moreover, is completely at odds with massive and continuing programs of grants at the political level, for which we

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are compelled to dig down in our pockets to provide the funds.

The inherent obligation of each individual, to sum it up, is to improve himself intellectually, technically, morally, to the utmost of his ability, and provide service to his fellow men primarily through the process of voluntary exchange, on the free market if such an institution is available. He should not become so preoccupied with the faults or the wants of others, real or fancied, as to forget his own limitations, and that charity begins at home. At the same time he should be glad to lend a helping hand on occasions where temporary assistance is clearly needed and will be welcomed. But he should always remember that every man deserves the precious opportunity to assume responsibility for his own course, whether he is swimming courageously upstream or paddling lazily, with plenty of company, in the other direction. ◈

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THE MOBILITY OF LABOR

DEAN RUSSELL

IT IS OFTEN CLAIMED that "capital" has an advantage in bargaining with "labor" because capital can move easily from one place to another while labor must stay put.

In truth, however, the reverse of that tired old cliché is more in harmony with reality. For the issue is *not* capital in the form of dollar bills but capital in the form of factories and machines. And factories are not quite as mobile as factory workers.

It is true that there have been cases of factory machinery being dismantled and moved from one state to another. But this is so rare that the event is headline news – and the union leaders immediately demand a law to prevent the machinery (and the owners) from "escaping."

Meanwhile, millions of workers shift around happily every year.

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That story is partially told in the following two statements from the book, *Economic Forces in the U.S.A.* (Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, sixth edition, 1960): "Between March 1957 and March 1958 about 33 million people, a fifth of the whole population, moved from one house or apartment to another. Over 5½ million of them (3 per cent of the population) moved out of one state into another." (page 16) Thus, it is obvious that *moving as such* presents no particular problem. But what about changing jobs?

"It has been estimated that with an average of about 68 million persons in the labor force (economically active) in 1954, roughly 100 million shifts, either into or out of the labor force, or between farm and nonfarm jobs, took place. If an additional 70 million job changes occurred within farm and nonfarm employment, then a total of 170 million moves were made in that year—a ratio of over 200 per cent of the average labor force." (page 31)

And still it is claimed that "labor" is at a disadvantage in bargaining for wages with "capital" because capital can move while labor can't!

During the past 30 years, I have lived for longer than one year in each of six different states and two foreign countries. And I have changed jobs at least ten times. During the last three decades, how many times have *you* changed jobs or moved from one place to another? We Americans are a moving people.

Even in those cases where it would be a considerable hardship for a worker to quit his job and move to another state to search for a new job, he still isn't at any disadvantage in bargaining with his employer for higher wages. For to whatever extent a threat to move can cause wages to rise, that service is done anyway by the workers who can move and are quite willing to do so. They are the ones who make sure that the highest possible wages are paid to all, including even those who would rather take a cut in pay than to move.

As long as the market remains free, this situation necessarily must continue for all industries and all workers. For it is only in a controlled economy that men are forbidden to move and to shop around for better jobs. And thus it is only in a controlled economy that workers are at a disadvantage in bargaining with their employers.

On this issue of mobility, clearly, it is labor (not capital) that still has the advantage here in the United States. ◈

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Is the UN Really NECESSARY?

WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

THE UNITED NATIONS has been and is the recipient of an enormous amount of propaganda ballyhoo, official and unofficial. Its supposed virtues and merits are trumpeted from the housetops; criticism of its numerous failures and structural defects is hushed and muted. Universities, churches, civic organizations are pressed into service in the UN cause. As a result, there has been created among the American people a widespread image of a universal organization serving the purposes of peace and justice and entitled to maximum individual and national support.

The truth, as a very concise survey of the indisputable facts of the UN record shows, is quite different. There have been a number of small wars and still more threats of war since the UN was established almost twenty years ago. Its influence on these wars and threats of war has been negligible, if not nonexistent. If only because of the tremendous risk of self-annihilation involved in a major conflict in the nuclear age, there is no reason to suppose that any big war would have taken place if the United Nations had not been brought into existence. Should some future would-be

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world conqueror decide to take the risk of unleashing such a conflict, the disapproval or censure of the United Nations, proved impotent in so many cases, would be the least of his worries. Those who still live in a dream world of euphoria about the United Nations and its achievements would be well advised to read the chapter, "Paul Bunyan and the United Nations," in the recently published tart, realistic book on international affairs by retired American diplomat, John Paton Davies.[1] To quote some of the more pungent paragraphs:

"The UN . . . is an arena of conspiracy, petty intrigue, and bombast. Some conflicts of national interest may be resolved in the UN, but many are inflamed and spread from local or regional disputes to worldwide proportions.

"The level of irresponsibility in the UN will continue to rise with Dr. Jagan's Guiana, Red China and more freshly cut-adrift colonies in prospect for membership . . . The more, perhaps, the merrier, but not, perforce, the wiser.

"Many of the new statesmen frequenting the UN, prominent among whom were Alex Quaison Sackey, Raul Roa, Sukardjo Wirjopronato, Dondogyo Tsevegmid, and Vengalil Krishan, Krishna Menon, were enthusiastic practitioners of busybody diplomacy . . .

"It is sometimes contended that the UN plays an indispensable role as a seminary in which immature nations can be tutored to stay out of mischief and fit themselves for our kind of international society. This view glosses over the competitive tutelage by the Communists, the presence of mature delinquents in the UN and the depth of antipathy to our kind of society in the immature nature. In any event the artificial environment of the UN is a poor cram course for international realities."

Look at the Record

Perhaps the best means of testing the efficacy of the UN's supposed role as a keeper of the peace is to run over the more serious international crises and conflicts that have occurred since it was organized and recall what it did, or, far more often, failed to do, in each.

1948-49. The Soviet blockade of all routes of rail, road, and water access to West Berlin, designed to force the Allied powers to quit the city by creating conditions of mass starvation. The blockade was countered and finally broken by the American-

[1] *Foreign and Other Affairs* by John Paton Davies, Jr. (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1964).

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British airlift, supported by the enthusiastic cooperation of the population of West Berlin, which gladly put up with temporary hardship rather than fall under communist tyranny and slavery. If there was any official protest from the UN against this inhuman effort to starve a large city into submission the fact has escaped the historical record.

June, 1950. A North Korean army, completely outfitted and supplied with modern weapons by the Soviet Union, crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded South Korea, massacring all known anticommunists as it advanced. This time, due to the accidental circumstance that the Soviet representative was boycotting sessions of the Security Council and was unable to cast his veto, the Security Council was able to authorize resistance, of which about 98 per cent of the burden in lives and treasure fell on South Korea and the United States. Small units from Great Britain, France, Turkey, Greece, and a minority of UN members fought creditably in Korea. But, by and large, it was a UN war and a U.S.-South Korean fight.

And against the help supplied by a few UN member states must be set the backseat driving and interference with strategic necessities which would not have occurred if the United States had been fighting the war independently. One need only recall the failure to bomb the bridges over the Yalu River over which Chinese forces poured after the North Korean army had been thoroughly shattered, the rejection of Chiang Kai-shek's offer to send Chinese nationalist troops to Korea, the rejection of General MacArthur's proposals to blockade the coast of mainland China and bomb selective targets in China after the Chinese intervention was an accomplished fact. Most of the UN member states, notably India, seemed more afraid of victory in Korea than of having the American effort there end in frustrated stalemate.

1956. Hungary and Suez. Almost simultaneously, the Soviet government, by massive military intervention, overthrew the legitimate government of Hungary; and Israel, from one direction, and Great Britain and France, from another, invaded the territory of Egypt. The Israeli attack followed a series of incursions into Israel by guerrillas organized on Egyptian soil and the Anglo-French military move was in reaction to Egyptian dictator Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, in which most of the stock was held by French and British citizens.

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On Hungary, by far the more flagrant and unprovoked of the two breaches of the peace, the UN did absolutely nothing, apart from serving as a forum for some critical speeches. In the case of Suez, a United Nations security force was sent to patrol certain sensitive areas along the Israel-Egyptian frontier. But the fighting ceased because the British and French withdrew under the combination of diplomatic and economic pressure from the United States and threats from Moscow.

1958. Red Chinese bombardment of the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu held by the Chinese Nationalists. UN action, nil. The Nationalists maintained – and still maintain – possession of Quemoy and Matsu mainly because the American Secretary of State at that time, John Foster Dulles, refused to be bluffed and intimidated by Red Chinese shells and an accompanying barrage of fainthearted articles by frightened commentators in the United States into putting pressure on Chiang Kai-shek to evacuate. Quemoy and Matsu, written off as "indefensible" by advocates of appeasement who suddenly turned into armchair military strategists, easily withstood the effects of the bombardment, which tapered off into a token operation.

1960. The Congo. The premature Belgian abandonment of political responsibility for this vast rich area of Central Africa – inhabited by illiterate primitive native tribes quite uncontrollable by the few half-educated native politicians in the cities – created a chaotic vacuum in which first Soviet, later Chinese, communism sought to create conditions for a take-over. So complete was the breakdown of elementary conditions of normal life, following the wholesale mutiny of the ragtag and bobtail armed forces, that even the first left wing "President" of the Congo "Republic," Patrice Lumumba, called for UN aid in restoring law and order and making it possible for public service to operate. For almost four years a UN military force, recruited from Sweden, Ireland, India, and some African states, was operating in the Congo; and the UN assumed wide advisory functions in civilian administration and economic life.

The whole venture ended in political, moral, and financial bankruptcy, mainly because the political directions which were voted by the UN General Assembly reflected the ultranationalist views of African and Asian member states, not the realities of the chaotic Congo. It would take too long to reconstruct the whole

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murky story of Congo farcical politics, tribal feuds, intrigues, and bewildering shifts of leading government figures.

But the UN got involved in senseless feuds with the two most constructive forces in the Congo: (1) Moise Tshombe's orderly biracial administration in Katanga, which protected Europeans and made it possible for the copper mines and other industrial enterprises to function smoothly; and (2) the Belgian technical specialists who were willing to continue serving in the Congo if they could receive elementary assurances of personal security, who were thoroughly acquainted with the country and its ways, and who were desperately needed if essential health and transportation services were to be kept in operation and the Congo was to be saved from a lapse into its original barbarism. The result was that, although some UN experts rendered valuable service, the balance-sheet of UN intervention was far from positive. When the last UN forces left the Congo the situation was little, if at all, more orderly than it had been when they took over.

The grossest misuse of the UN force was to attack and overthrow Tshombe's administration in Katanga. It was indeed a sorry day in December, 1962, when simultaneously the UN forces battered their way into Elizabethville, capital of Katanga, and the United States advanced a large loan to the brash anti-Western dictator of Ghana, Nkrumah, who had been making all the mischief in his power in the Congo, following the abdication of Belgian power. There was a final touch of irony when Tshombe, vilified and denounced by all the propaganda resources at the disposal of the UN and also of the United States, took over the central administration of the rickety Congo government and was accepted in Washington as the man most likely to create some semblance of unity, peace, and orderly conditions in his distraught country. So – although, in contrast to the usual record of inaction in the face of threats to peace, there was UN action in the Congo – the course and result of this action give little ground for hope that this conglomerate organization of nations with widely differing forms of government, economic and social systems, and degrees and standards of education can successfully guide such a difficult and complex enterprise as the reconstruction of the Congo.

1958-62. The off-and-on Soviet threat to the independence and security of West Berlin. This was a continuing and potentially very

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serious threat to freedom and to international peace. In November, 1958, Soviet dictator Nikita Khrushchev, perhaps intoxicated by Soviet successes in space exploration, gave a six months time limit for the withdrawal from West Berlin of the small American, British, and French forces which are the guaranty of the independence of West Berlin, an island in the surrounding sea of the Soviet Zone. This time limit was subsequently canceled, then reimposed, and put off again. What the UN did, even in words, about this real and constant threat to peace in Berlin was precisely nothing.

1962. There was an even more dramatic confrontation, with possibilities of nuclear conflict, in Cuba in the autumn of 1962. Khrushchev smuggled a considerable number of Soviet intermediate range missiles, capable of devastating American cities, into Cuba. The United States government imposed a naval blockade and was prepared to resort to stronger measures to get the missiles – which Khrushchev probably intended to use for blackmailing purposes on the Berlin issue – removed from Cuba. After a tense few days the Soviet dictator backed down and consented to remove the missiles. And this also marked – at least for the next two years, until Khrushchev's fall from power – the end of the Soviet-provoked Berlin crisis. The firmness which the United States showed on the issue of Soviet missiles in Cuba finally convinced Khrushchev that he could not force the Western powers out of West Berlin without risking a major war.

It is interesting and significant to note that in the ultimate showdown over the Cuban missile threat the UN made no contribution to a settlement. The American people had to rely on the purpose, strength, and firmness of their own government. It is also worth remembering that the UN never uttered a peep of censure or protest against the erection of the notorious wall which cut the city of Berlin in two, separated from each other members of thousands of families, and was repeatedly the scene of acts of revolting cruelty when armed guards shot down East Germans making a desperate attempt to escape to the liberty of the West.

Another violation of peace in the autumn of 1962 was the Red Chinese invasion of India. That country had been one of the most persistent advocates of neutrality, of nonalignment between East and West. In season and out of season India had urged the admission of Red China to the UN. But when

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Red China made this rather ungrateful return for India's good offices, India had to look for help to the United States and Great Britain, not to the UN.

Other acts of violence and aggression on which the UN has not uttered even the mildest protest or condemnation are India's forcible seizure of Goa in 1961, the Indonesian annexation of West New Guinea, preceded by landing of troops in the area, and the current guerrilla war which the Indonesian dictator Sukarno is waging against Malaysia.

A False Image

American public opinion has been deluded long enough about the nature and possibilities of the United Nations. A false image has been created of an organization with an independent personality of its own, which it is the duty of the United States to support and strengthen as an effective shield of international peace. But it is nothing of the kind. Over 100 Soviet vetoes prove that the UN, even if it desired, could take no effective action against any aggression, direct or indirect, which the Soviet Union might favor. Moreover, the present UN, now swelled to more than double its original membership, largely because of the proliferation of new independent African and Asian states, many of them minuscule in population and resources (Africa is absurdly overrepresented because of the fragmentation of the French colonial empire into a dozen minor principalities) is more and more dominated by a spirit of have-not neutralism.

About the only resolutions for which a majority is certain in the UN Assembly are intemperate denunciations of "colonialism" (so long as this is not of Soviet or Chinese origin), appeals for all-out disarmament, with no provision for necessary safeguards, and expressions of the belief that the rest of the world owes the "under-developed" areas a living.

The UN Charter envisages the Security Council, composed of five permanent and six nonpermanent members, as the strong executive right arm of the organization. But a paralyzed right arm is of little value. And what common purpose can be expected from a Security Council now made up of the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, Nationalist China, Bolivia, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Morocco, and the Gold Coast, the last one of the little splinters of the French colonial empire? Obviously, none at all. And conflict and diversity of viewpoints explain why the Security Council has accomplished virtually nothing during the last

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two decades. The United Nations does not live up to its name. As an association of profoundly divided nation states its deliberations and resolutions often suggest the Biblical Tower of Babel.

The Present Alignment

In the UN as now composed it would be impossible to count on even an adverse vote of censure, much less on any positive effective action against aggression directed from Moscow or Peiping. On the other hand, there is serious danger that undue respect for UN resolutions on such issues as the conduct of the South African government and the settlement of the status of Southern Rhodesia could draw the United States into actions which are contrary to its best interests.

The attempt to place the authority of the United Nations behind acceptable statements of principle has been unsuccessful because of the basic incompatibility between communist and free society ideals. A UN proposed convention on freedom of the press and information came out so badly that the United States felt obliged to withdraw its support. The point was that communist-ruled states regard freedom of the press and all other freedoms as privileges, to be granted or withheld at the discretion of an absolute state, while the framers of the United States Constitution upheld the principle of man's natural, God-given rights, which no government may lawfully deny or abridge.

There is every likelihood that on such issues as crusading anti-colonialism, share-the-wealth projects, and unsound disarmament schemes the United States may find itself in the embarrassing position of being outvoted in the UN Assembly. In view of this possibility, in view of the proved incapacity of the United Nations to serve as an effective deterrent to wars and threats of war, advocacy of "strengthening" the organization makes little sense.

Small wars and internal disturbances have occurred in many areas, in Cyprus, in Yemen, in Vietnam, along the Chinese-Indian border, in Algeria, and the Congo, to mention only a few. And the United Nations has displayed no ability to stop these. Nor has it been a factor in warding off the occasional threats of bigger conflicts. It is a fifth wheel in international relations. America's best security against blundering into war or having war forced on it by an insatiable aggressor remains just what it has been in the past: the power of its armed forces, the stability and validity of its alliances, the firmness, skill,

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and intelligence of its diplomacy. The United Nations can accomplish nothing that old-fashioned diplomacy cannot do better, if only because of the absence of the play of Klieg lights on the latter proceedings.

The UN has received such a propaganda build-up that it would probably not be practical politics to recommend outright American withdrawal, except in response to some gross affront to the American moral sense, such as the admission of Red China to membership. If such a contingency should loom, it would be wise and appropriate for the United States government to make it clear that there is one UN seat Red China can have any time: ours.

Barring any such challenge, the most suitable policy would be that of disengagement, of realistically downgrading the importance of an organization where there is such a divorce of power and responsibility, where Upper Volta votes in the Assembly on equal terms with the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain. ◈

LIFETIME JOB SECURITY

RECENTLY the head of one of America's largest labor unions came up with an old idea – that corporations should guarantee lifetime job security to workers. This idea is certain to appeal to many people because it sounds like a worthwhile and humane goal – but this suggestion is based on a false idea. Then there are also some hidden implications that run contrary to the course of events.

First, why *is* the idea of lifetime job security, guaranteed by a corporation, built on a sandy foundation? Simply because a corporation, regardless of size, does *not* have the economic power to fulfill such a guarantee. From an economic standpoint, an employee doesn't retain his job at the discretion of the corporation – but,

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rather, at the discretion of the corporation's *customers*.

In other words, while a worker's paycheck is handed to him *by* the corporation, it doesn't come *from* the corporation. All wages come *directly* from consumers who buy what the corporation offers for sale. If customers stop buying, wage and other expense monies stop coming in – and all the good intentions or guarantees in the world won't enable a corporation to keep unneeded employees on the payroll. There just isn't enough money in the till to do so. In short, since consumers hold life or death power over all jobs, *only they* are able to guarantee job security – and this they won't do!

And why won't they? Consumers won't guarantee you *your* job, or me *my* job because the only guarantee *they* have of getting the most for *their* money is their freedom to shop. This is called the "discipline of the free market." And, if we think about it, we wouldn't have it any other way – because we, in the final analysis, are consumers ourselves. We work to fill our wants; and when we fill our wants, we consume.

Second, what about the hidden implications mentioned above? The most obvious is that, to gain the greatest degree of job security from consumers, employees must readily submit to consumer demands. But consumers don't impose their demands on employees *directly*, they do it through *employers*. Since this is so, the best way employees can meet consumer demands is to allow their employer, the corporation, as free a hand as possible in meeting consumer demands. This calls for a high degree of flexibility in areas of cost control (of which wages are a part), work rules, and others too numerous to mention. Employees who thus cooperate with their employer in wooing the consumer dollar will come closest to winning lifetime job security. In short, workers will be wiser to look to the *consumer*, the real source of job security – not to the corporation. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Plato

"THE ONLY STANDARD today is the pleasure of the hearers no matter what sort of men they are, but those are blind who have no clear standard, and the divine is the eternal measure."

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ON *Freedom* AND ORDER

LEONARD E. READ

MY PURPOSE in this essay is to throw some light on an important but obscure argument concerning the orderly nature of the free market economy. Unless the point is understood, the free economy stands in danger of extinction. But if the point is to be clarified, it must first be isolated from the general confusion that attends the fear of chaos and the desire for order.

Most of us claim an affinity for freedom; but if given a choice between a freedom suspected of chaos and a regimentation assured of order, we would choose the regimentation. We instinctively fear and detest the opposite of order which is chaos, and for a good and compelling reason: man cannot exist unless nearly everything in his life situation is orderly, that is, unless a vast majority of expectations can be taken for granted and counted on to materialize. Man's existence requires a fairly dependable level of order.

For example, man could not exist if he could not count on oxygen in the next volume of air he inhales or if he could not confidently expect Old Sol to rise on the morrow. Were there any doubt about the continual rhythm of these events, the doubt alone would do him in. Or let only minor mishaps intrude themselves into the autonomic nervous system – which, beyond conscious effort, controls heartbeats, breathing, glandular and countless other bodily activities – and man's earthly days are over. Man is a nervous animal and one of the conditions of survival is a dependable, orderly sequence of things to come.

Nor need we limit our observations to the necessity for orderliness in nature or in man's person; also required is an orderly social environment so that man can

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know what to expect, within limits, from his fellow men. Suppose, for instance, that no one could be counted on to keep his word, that promises were meaningless, that capriciousness in everything were the rule: buy a can of beans only to find it filled with mud; hire workers who refuse to work; contract one price and get charged a higher price; earn a livelihood that is subject to confiscation at anyone else's pleasure; act peacefully but with no security of body and limb; and so on and on. Man can endure but little of this; he can't cope with life at sixes and sevens, with many things in the realm of uncertainty. And because of this he will pay almost any price – even his freedom – for certainty, for order. Indeed, when confronted with but a modicum of chaos, he will accept with alacrity numerous variations of the goose step, those constraints which minimize uncertainties and thus give him the semblance of order.

But most of these "goose steps" which give a semblance of order such as controls of prices, wages, rents, hours of labor, or "planned" production and exchange – economic freezes, one might say – are not, in fact, order. On the contrary, these rigidities are examples of chaos and of interference with men's choices and expectations.

"Where We Want to Be"

The truth is that order and chaos in the economic realm are the reverse of what is generally supposed to be the case. It is doubtful if anyone could more strikingly phrase this common confusion than was done by one of our country's most powerful labor officials. He wrote:

> Only a moron would believe that *the millions of private economic decisions* being made independently of each other will somehow harmonize in the end and bring us out where we want to be.[1]

If "where we want to be" is under a dictatorship, this statement about the market might make sense. Otherwise, this evidences an utter confusion as to the nature of man and the nature of the market.

Analogous to the labor leader's "millions of private economic decisions" are the "millions" of creative decisions within each human being, such as: 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 atoms of numerous configurations; some 30,000,000,000,000 cells; bone marrow producing 1,000,000,000 new red blood cells every 60 seconds; each kidney having some 5,000,000 complex glomeruli; a diencephalon, a portion of the brainstem that acts independently of con-

[1] See *The New York Times*, June 30, 1962.

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sciousness: a cranium filled with nerve tissues having a seemingly unlimited supply of neuroblasts – unfinished nerve cells – which can, with conscious effort and other disciplines, be transformed into functioning neurons. Such enormous, utterly staggering phenomena of man's composition – "fearfully and wonderfully made," unfathomable to our finite minds – appears as chaos. These trillions upon trillions of data, about which we have but the dimmest notions, can easily tempt one to conclude: "Only a moron would believe that these will somehow harmonize in the end and bring us out where we want to be."

These phenomena are not chaotic as they appear to be but, instead, are an order of creation we cannot comprehend. For they do harmonize and bring us out where we want to be: a human being, the most amazing example of order within our awareness.

Of Markets and Men

Order, I suspect, is never the product of chaos; it would seem that only order can beget order. And I firmly believe that this rule applies as much to the market as it does to man. True, we do not seriously question the point as it relates to man; we are so dumbfounded by the mystery of life that we readily concede that only God can make a tree – or a man. But there is all too little of this faith and humility as it concerns the market. Here, when we witness millions of economic decisions made independently of each other, we will, if not perceptive, call them chaos; whereas, in fact, we are viewing an order the complexity of which cannot be brought within our limited grasp. What we lightly pass off as chaos is but a reflection of our failure to comprehend.

Take only a casual look at our economic world. Visit Russia, Red China, Cuba, East Germany. Like our labor official and many of our educators and business "leaders," these unfortunate people do not understand how millions of decisions made independently of each other could possibly harmonize in the end and bring about efficacious results; that is, their minds, deficient in awareness, sensing only chaos in the complex data of the free and unfettered market, proceed to bring "order" out of it. How? A Mr. Big takes over and substitutes his one-source decisions for the millions of decisions that would otherwise be made independently of each other. But observe that one man's orders bring about everyone's chaos, as deadening in the end as if he himself were to take over the forces that make him a human

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being. He can no more mastermind market data than he can the data of his own being, that is, without disaster.

A Housewife's Nightmare

Unfortunately, the chaos brought on by one-source decisions – dictatorship – is seldom thought of as chaos once the subjects have endured it for a short time. Like wild animals placed in zoos – as soon as the shock of contrast is over – the subjects come to think of their fetters as more a part of ordered than chaotic life. But let an American housewife, for instance, accustomed as she is to an economy in which decisions are made more or less independently of each other – where the free market is approximated – awaken suddenly to a Russian, one-source-decision situation: the larder bare, no telephone, no car, no taxi available, standing in line hours on end only to find a scrap of this or that for her family; freedom of expression, of writing, of religion denied; a suppression of desires, aspirations, ambitions. What a shock such a sudden contrast would evoke! Mrs. America would, indeed, be conscious of an unbelievable chaos; she would correctly conclude that a great deal of order had been removed from her life situation.

The more a country's economy is politically ordered or "planned," the more chaotic is production and exchange. Conversely, the freer the market – that is, the greater the extent that economic decisions are made independently of each other – the more order there is in production and exchange. Try making purchases in Havana and then try in Chicago or Keokuk. You will have little doubt as to where the order is. Or if it be argued that Cuba hasn't had time to "make socialism work," then compare experiences in Moscow with Hong Kong. Russia has been at it for nearly half a century! Also bear in mind that the chaos which is manifest in the Moscow market place must have its origin in chaos: a one-source-decision apparatus; that the order which is manifest in the Hong Kong market place must have its origin in order: millions of economic decisions made independently of each other.

The Nature of Things

Order is not necessarily characterized by things in a static, motionless relationship, as is so often thought. Take, for instance, heavenly bodies: *motion in relation to one another is of their nature;* they manifest order only when orbiting. Were they to behave contrary to their nature, that is, were their swift flight through the void

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to halt, cosmic chaos would result.

Now, reflect on neat rows of cemetery headstones. As distinguished from heavenly bodies, *a static, motionless relationship of each to the others is of their nature.* Were these headstones to go into motion or orbit, a behavior contrary to their nature, we would observe the contrary of order: chaos!

These observations are meant to suggest that it is the frustration of the nature of a thing that spells chaos – order consisting of what is in harmony with a thing's nature. What is order in one instance might be chaos in another. The nature of the thing prescribes the characteristics of the order and the chaos peculiar to it.

The Nature of Man

Consider the nature of man. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, amusingly oversimplified it when he suggested that man is on earth as in an egg; that he cannot go on forever being a good egg; that he has to hatch or rot. Man's nature, as distinguished from that of other animals, is to evolve, to emerge; it is to grow in consciousness, awareness, perception; it is to make strides as a rational animal and, eventually, to make choices with intelligent discrimination and, to some extent, to will his own actions. Men – potentially, at least – must be included in creative phenomena and any thwarting or frustration of this, his sensitive and spiritual nature, must induce chaos. The man-imposed goose step in its social, political, and economic versions – the headstone kind of static, motionless order – is the antithesis of any order that has to do with expanding consciousness.

Man, in the light of his destiny, is not a static organism. This is unthinkable. Furthermore, the free and unfettered market is but the unfrustrated economic manifestation of man's creative, emerging, spiritual dynamism. Man enjoys freedom only if he be free to act. This is self-evident; it needs no proof. Thus, it follows that man can be free only if his peaceful, creative actions are not aborted. This is to say that man can be free to emerge in the direction of his destiny only if his market – economic expressions of men – be free. The free market, founded on economic decisions made independently of each other and resting, as it does, on common consent, is consonant and in harmony with freely acting man. Dynamism, in this context – moving, flowing, creative, kinetic energy – is as much a characteristic of the free market as it is of the individual human being, man and his market being but two parts of a

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whole: this dynamism is of the nature of each. Order in either case – man or his market – exists only as this dynamism, showing forth peacefully and creatively, finds unfrustrated expression. Any man-imposed goose step must breed chaos just as surely as if some human dictator were to stop the heavenly bodies in their orbits.

In the above I have tried to suggest that we must look to the nature of a thing to determine what is order and what is chaos. Whenever we impose the headstone variety of static, motionless order to man and his market, that is, whenever we substitute one-source decisions for millions of decisions made independently of each other, we get chaos for our unintelligent pains. *And it is axiomatic that freedom must disappear as we practice the error!*

The Miracle of the Market

To illustrate the mysterious order of the free market, think of any one of a million goods or services: corn flakes, atomizers, hats, automobiles, radios, TV sets, telephones, machine tools, computers, illumination, and so on, things that are left more or less to countless decisions made independently of each other. Millions upon millions of tiny think-of-thats, little creativities, individual acceptances and rejections, whims, likes and dislikes – forces too numerous ever to recount and which appear as chaos but are, instead, complex order – miraculously combine to form the fantastic order of these artifacts by which we live. Observe that the order of these is so perfect, their production and exchange and their demand and supply so nicely balanced, that we take them as much for granted as we do the air we breathe. Never a second thought! No argument! And, further, the very fact that an automobile, for instance, is an orderly mechanism is testimony in itself that it originated out of order, not out of chaos.

Now, reflect on those goods and services no longer entrusted to the millions of economic decisions made independently of each other in a free market but delegated instead to one-source governmental decision as a way of bringing "order" out of "chaos." To cite a few: an ever-enlarging part of employment, many wages, prices, exchanges; a good deal of housing; wheat, tobacco, corn, cotton; more and more power and light; roads, education, money value, and others. Observe the imbalances and note that these are the only goods and services we ever argue about. By this method, we do not bring order out of chaos but, rather, chaos out of order! The very fact that these are in a cha-

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otic state is testimony in itself that they have their origin in chaos.

One consequence of confusing order and chaos is a static market and its aftermath, a frustration of man's nature, the free market being but the extension or manifestation of the free man. Damage cannot be done to the free market without an equal damage to man's nature. When men are compelled to look to a one-source decision instead of to the individual decisions of men, man is robbed of his wholeness. Self-responsibility, the corollary of self-decision and the wellspring of man's growth, gives way to cheap politics, mass plunder, pressure grouping, protectionism. Any time a society is organized in such a manner that a premium is put on the obeisance paid to political planners and when little, if any, reward attends integrity and self-reliance, the members of that society will tend more to rot than to hatch!

If human beings were meant to be ordered in such fashion as are the moving atoms in a molecule of motionless mineral, is it conceivable that any one man or organized group of men would be capable of planning and directing the lives and activities of all others? It is precisely because we differ from one another, because – as even the communists admit – each has his needs, that human beings require freedom to express those needs and to satisfy them, individual by individual. The free market affords a mechanism for the expression of these countless differences, in the bidding and asking prices, the voluntary buying and selling of scarce resources, whereby each may pursue his own proper interests without infringing upon or denying the nature and the interests of any other peaceful person. When alternatives have been sought to the open market, the result always has been some variation of the master-slave arrangement, with one man's order bringing chaos into the lives of others.

Why the Confusion?

We are led to speculate on why this confusion about order and chaos. While there are few who put the case for the headstone variety of order as boldly and as honestly as the labor official, all who argue for and introduce rigidities into the market are up to the same mischief. Sadly, not a category of the population is exempt: teachers share heavily in the guilt as do preachers, business and civic leaders; indeed, were it said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," few rocks would fly.

When the error is as general as this one, the cause must lie very

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deep, indeed. Inspect this suspicion of mine and see if it makes sense. Man – most men – suffers a fearful contradiction. There is on the one hand his God-given nature: to be born on this earth, to grow and to emerge in consciousness; to age and, eventually, to depart this earth. This cosmic, evolutionary tug is a powerful force but not as a rule, a force about which man is sharply conscious. Then, on the other hand, there is man's slight, budding ability to reason and choose – an ability still linked to an abysmal ignorance. Being but dimly aware of his natural destiny or how ignorant he is, man tends to ascribe to his reason an omniscience out of all proportion to what the facts warrant. Thus, man – most men – is confronted with two powerful commandments that are in conflict, one might say, at war with each other.

Man's nature calls for a flexing, an improving use and a continuing growth of the faculties, regardless of how uncomfortable or painful this perpetual stretching may be. Then, in opposition, is his defective ability to reason which commands him to remove himself from the struggle, to get out of rather than into life, in a word, to seek ease.

That man's "reasoning" is often a more powerful push than is the tug of his natural destiny is evidenced by his fear of earthly departure. Viewed rationally, it would seem that departing this earth is as congenial to man's nature as being born. Both arrival and departure are but two parts of life's equation; whatever has a beginning has a conclusion. Yet, note how general the fear is.

Afraid to Die—or Live

But now to my point: Not only is man – most men – fearful of that aspect of his nature which is his earthly demise, but he is equally fearful of that aspect of his nature which is life's living! Observe the tendency to run away from problems, obstacles; the passion for wealth as a means of relief from employment; the yearning for security; the ambition to retire; and, specifically to my point, the dread of competition and the craving for protection. Man – most men – as a consequence of this "reasoning," seeks a static, motionless kind of order – the headstone variety – while his nature calls for an order of the dynamic variety which man, unless perceptive, looks upon as chaos.

Competition – our attitude toward it – gets to the heart of the problem. It is the great antistatic force, the enemy of status; competition is the activating agent,

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the gyrator, so to speak, in man's life and in his market; it keeps things whipped up, moving, changing, improving, always uncomfortable, sometimes painful, but, nonetheless, dynamic. A noncompetitive society is a monopolistic society. Competition is the ally of man's natural destiny and, thus, it is the preservative of his freedom; without competition man's market and man himself would fall into a state of lethargy; the static kind of order would prevail, in which freedom is impossible.

Be it noted that human beings, as if in response to their natural and evolutionary destiny, favor competition for everyone – except one person: self! As for self, "reason" takes command and seeks protection against the uneasiness competition imposes.

When everyone favors competition for me – except me – it would seem that the competitors have it, that protection for me would be impossible. But when we let government – organized police force – intervene in the market place, that is, in creative human actions, thus permitting government a power sway over and beyond keeping the peace, we provide a fatal flaw in the armor of freedom. It is called logrolling: "I'll vote for your protection if you'll vote for mine." And, as protection spreads, competition correspondingly decreases, monopoly increases, and freedom diminishes. We achieve the headstone kind of order which, for man, is chaos.

We may never be able to mend the aforementioned flaw until we acquire a more rational view of competition – human dynamics – than we now have; not a more rational view of competition for others – this we possess – but for self. If I concede that competition is desirable for all others, how, rationally, can I make an exception of myself? It doesn't make sense.

Keeping in mind man's natural, evolutionary destiny, competition is as good for me as for anyone else. Admittedly, experience helps in being rational: About forty years ago my competitors ran me out of the wholesale produce business. I had to sell my home, furniture, car, everything to pay the creditors. Broke! A painful experience, indeed! But had it not been for competition, I would, no doubt, be in that business today. Not that there is anything wrong with being a wholesale produce merchant; it is that I did not belong in that role. Others were better fitted for it. And, important to me, I was led – not happily at first – to discover that there were other employments that better suited my aptitudes. Competition made it possible for me to discover how

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best to allocate those few resources peculiar to my own person. Competition is at once the economizer and activator; it helps to keep us on the creative move and to find the niche appropriate to the distinctive abilities of each.

If the above reflections are at all valid, it is certain that individual freedom cannot exist among people whose main emphasis is on security, status, protection. Building fences (protectionism) against freedom in transactions (the free market) is of the same ill-suited order as rejecting those evolutionary forces which conspire to make improving human beings out of mankind. The fixations and rigidities implicit in status are of an order in which freedom is impossible.

Freedom exists only as her imperative is observed: *all peaceful and creative actions unrestrained.* True, this calls for an order so complex that it gives the appearance of chaos but, instead, it is only incomprehensible order; it is the order of a living tree, of emerging man, of creation going on before our eyes.

Freedom is a condition of all creation, including man's share in it. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

The Pressure to Succeed

NOTHING IS MORE DANGEROUS to the well-being of a theatre than when the director is so placed that a greater or less receipt at the treasury does not affect him personally, and he can live on in careless security, knowing that, however the receipts at the treasury may fail in the course of the year, at the end of that time he will be able to indemnify himself from another source. It is a property of human nature soon to relax when not impelled by personal advantage or disadvantage.

WOLFGANG VON GOETHE,
from Eckermann's *Conversations of Goethe*

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The Great Difference

PAUL L. POIROT

VARIETY is much more than the spice of life. It also is the bread and butter of life, the meat and potatoes. A gray sameness is the hue of death, not life.

This is common knowledge. Yet, many of us today are so preoccupied with the search for common causes, common interests, and common denominators that the variety among human beings upon which our lives and livelihoods depend is threatened with obliteration. We forget that our differences, not our likenesses, afford the only reasons there are to associate and cooperate with one another.

Could any one, or any possible combination of us, help any other if all of us were in every way the same? And in that event, even if we agreed to do one another's laundry, what could be the point? It would all be the same in the end, and no one would have gained anything by reason of such exchanges.

So, perhaps we need to remind ourselves and one another of our individual natures, our differences, our variable abilities, and our variable needs if we would continue to develop our respective lives in the company of others. Instead of seeking sameness from

Our lives depend upon our differences.

the cradle to the grave, let us explore and exploit the differences by which we live.

"Human equality" is not a working formula of the Creator; it is a technical term of limited political application.[1] Our mani-

[1] We acknowledge that men should be "equal under the law." Civilized coexistence requires certain minimum rules such as mutual respect for life and property. Penalties are to be assessed impartially against any violator of these basic rules.

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fest and manifold inequalities extend to every facet of our beings, from the tiniest of our physical features to the highest powers of our intellects and spirits, including all the goods and services and products and all the other results toward which human thought and action are directed. No two individuals are equally motivated to any given end nor equally endowed to achieve it; nor are the economic, political, and moral circumstances of any one's environment precisely the same as for any other.

It may be argued in this connection that persons can and do cooperate or combine their similar qualities in a joint venture, as do the oarsmen of a college crew, or the "Rockettes" at Radio City Music Hall, or the helpful neighbors at a barn raising. But it should be remembered that college crew racing remains a popular sport precisely because oarsmen are different rather than identical; otherwise, no crew ever could win or lose a race. The precision dancing of the "Rockettes" does not reveal the divergent reasons why each girl dances, or the reasons why customers pay to view the performance. Each man straining to hoist the side of a neighbor's barn will have in his mind's eye the help he expects on his own pet project when the time comes.

Through different eyes we see different worlds against which to match our different scales of values. And by what human standard can anyone attest that this is not the way things are or ought to be?

Whether or not we like it, this is the competitive nature of our world. Every moment for every living thing is a continuing struggle to bring its differences into harmony with an ever-changing environment. The living is in the struggle and the competition. The individual living entity loses its identity – dies – when it ceases to compete, when it lets itself be fully merged into another body or organism or group or system, becoming as an atom in a stone rather than a dynamic self-motivated being.

Competition the Life of Trade

From memory, if not from understanding, we know that competition is the life of trade. This simply is another way of saying that all economic relationships, as conducted in the open market, are based upon our differences. As we survey scarce resources through our different scales of value and respective consumer tastes, we find opportunities for specialized production and voluntary exchange, to the advantage and satisfaction of everyone involved.

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Each party to every voluntary exchange must necessarily gain, giving up what he values less in order to get what he values more, else he would not freely enter the trade.

Now, it is true that many prospective buyers may be competing for every available unit of an economic good, and this competition may seem to drive up the price that must be paid for the unit. But consider for a moment what price one might have to pay if he were the only person in the world who wanted a 1965 Cadillac – and the manufacturer knew in advance that this was going to be the demand situation! The cost would be fantastic. Competition among buyers does not necessarily mean higher priced merchandise. The fact that several prospective buyers are in the market affords the opportunity for lower unit costs through mass production.

Also, there is likely to be competition among prospective suppliers or sellers of any given item and of various substitutes for it. Such competition to sell is the buyer's insurance that prices will be reasonable. It also affords each manufacturer or supplier a check of his own methods and operations and his finished products against those of competitors, so that any improvements and efficiencies introduced by any one of them will soon be copied and in turn improved upon by others in the business. Competition also lets a man know promptly when he fails while there is yet time to try his hand elsewhere.

This competition among manufacturers and suppliers activates and stimulates the markets for labor and raw materials. The raw materials will be drawn from farms and forests and mines, slowly or rapidly as the market forces may signal, but always with an eye to the conservation of scarce resources and the substitution therefor of less expensive and more plentiful alternative factors of production.

Variety is the essence of life, competition the life of trade.

Labor, of course, is one of those always-scarce factors of production which the unhampered market strives to conserve and use sparingly, competitors constantly weighing the comparative costs of additional tools and mechanization versus extra men on a given job. Competition among employers bids wage rates up to the limits the market will allow at any given time and place. And competition among workers encourages each to

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move toward the best job opportunities available to match his particular skills and aptitudes.

In every open and unhampered market economy or society there is constant competition among those who want to utilize available goods and services, whether they be ultimate consumers of food, clothing, medical care, shelter, and the like, or whether they be industrialists seeking additional capital, raw materials, goods and services, to be used in the further output of producer and consumer goods. The same open market serves us all, and serves very well indeed if free to do so – that is, if it is not restricted by artificial man-made barriers to trade and by interference with the voluntary movement of capital and labor. The free market recognizes and respects our manifold differences and affords each individual the maximum opportunity to express his individuality and to pursue his own interests by serving others.

Perhaps a reminder is in order at this point, the reminder that our individualities, our different interests, and our abilities to achieve them, extend beyond our persons – our physical bodies – and include the private property each has earned and owns. A man's property is the extension of his life, a part of his means of livelihood, which he may consume or sell or give away or save or use in whatever manner seems to him to best serve his own interests. Thus, property – in land or buildings or tools or consumer items or whatever form – tends to take upon itself the characteristics of each owner and thus to reflect the differences and the infinite variability to be found among human beings.

Privately owned property is by no means the same as that which is supposedly owned in common and therefore belongs to no one. Private ownership, like personal freedom of choice, is essential if there is to be voluntary exchange or any other act of peaceful cooperation among individuals. In other words, we trade upon our differences, not our sameness; and our differences extend to and through the property each owns.

The Unhappy Alternatives

To more fully appreciate the blessings of competition and trade through which our differences are exercised to everyone's best advantage, let us now consider some of the alternative concepts and plans that always have stood in the way of the slow progress of man toward becoming human.

The modern extension of poverty in India under the successive "Plans" of the Nehru government affords a sad illustration of the

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failure of compulsory equalization among men. The years of effort to industrialize the economy of India, aided and abetted by gifts and loans through the governments of other nations, have so disturbed her traditional agricultural production that serious famine and mass starvation now seem certain. Heavy taxes have tended to drain from agricultural uses the little capital that might otherwise have been available. Land reform measures have taken management responsibilities from the more capable and transferred the task to those less able to manage. Price control and rationing programs have precluded any progress the free market might have afforded in conserving scarce resources and encouraging further production of those most needed items.

The basic premise behind Nehru's plans was that all Indians either are, or ought to be, alike. And whether recognized or not, this has to be the premise for all schemes of compulsory equalization. There is no more respect for the individual dignity of those to be aided than for the individual rights to life and property of those compelled to render the aid. Differences among men are to be obliterated; and if this is accomplished, then to that extent are wiped away the reasons men have for trading, cooperating, voluntarily helping one another. And with this destruction of mutual respect goes the loss of self-respect. This is the great problem of India today, and it is the inevitable consequence of compulsory equalization, all over the world, whenever and wherever it is undertaken.

American Experiments

Countless other examples could be cited from abroad, but the sad fact is that we already have the counterpart of all of them right here on our own doorstep in the United States.

After more than a generation of heavily subsidized agriculture, which presumably should have improved the economic status of farmers and given an abundance of food for all consumers, we are now told by the master planners that millions of U. S. citizens go to bed hungry each night and that additional Federal aid is needed for farmers.

To the extent that we c... our differences by force, we diminish ourselves and each other — we die.

No less acute is the housing crisis following years of rent control, public housing, and urban renewal programs designed to eliminate differences and bring

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about greater equality in the enjoyment of housing facilities. The more the government intervenes in this area, the greater the cry for further intervention because landlords and tenants can no longer find a reasonable basis for voluntary exchange, because prospective home builders and prospective home buyers are finding more and more barriers in the traditional market lines of communication with one another.

Government intervention by way of the Wagner Act and subsequent labor legislation has all but destroyed the opportunity for competitive bargaining and peaceful exchange between employers and employees. The higher the government-enforced minimum wage rates and unemployment benefit payments, the more serious becomes the problem of caring for the unemployed. When the law sanctions union practices that tend to equalize the output of workers and the wages they receive, regardless of performance, this compulsory elimination of differences among men denies them the opportunity to cooperate and trade voluntarily. "Collective bargaining" and "arbitration" have come to be synonyms for coercion.

After 25 years of taxing and coddling the aged under compulsory social security, the oldsters have largely lost the capacity or the will to care for themselves, and it is difficult to see how a self-betrayed older generation can command the respect of the youngsters expected to support them.

The problems of education increase in direct proportion to the extent of state and Federal aid and government control over education.

There is every reason to expect that electrical services may become as unreliable and inefficient as the postal service if the government moves further toward monopoly of the power and light business. The compulsory elimination of competition is the ultimate in equalization, after which neither love nor money will enable a customer to obtain anything better than the mediocre.

Enough examples; the evidence is all about us that our lives depend upon our differences, that variety is the essence of life, competition the life of trade. To the extent that we compose our differences by force, we diminish ourselves and each other—and we die.

Let us cultivate and exploit our individualities and our differences, for this way points the upward path of human progress — economically, socially, spiritually — the path of peaceful cooperation among men. ◈

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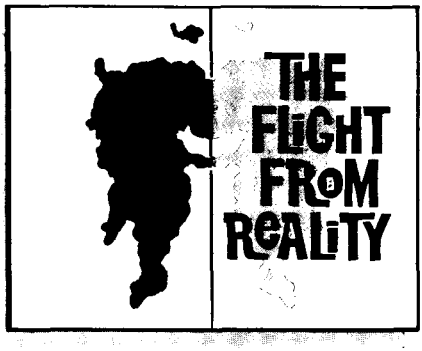

4. Cutting Loose from Reality

CLARENCE B. CARSON

Let us face . . . the bleakness of the modern world: admit that religion and philosophy are projections of the mind, and set about the betterment of man's condition.

— JOHN BOWLE on Auguste Comte

THE BENT of men to reform – to make over man and society in their image – was held in check by traditional philosophy. Philosophy reined in the unbridled imagination just as religion tended to puncture the human ego and divest it of false pride. Above all, rational philosophy imposed a strict discipline upon thought. The philosopher had to keep checking his conceptions and holding them up beside reality; ideas had to bear a demonstrable relation to reality. Reality had objective existence in traditional Western philosophy; its being did not depend upon the human mind.

Men come to know reality by the use of reason. But reason was not conceived as a creation of human ingenuity; it was rather a marvelous faculty given to man that he might guide himself by its use, its possession not an occasion for pride but an indication of the obligation to use it. Indeed, traditionally reason was authority, second only to revelation, and some would give it first place. The weight of authority, of reason, of reality, smothered any incipient reformism. It could be argued that philosophy, coupled with religion, usually did the job too well, that philosophers were too sanguine about the possibilities of human improvement, that too low an estimate of human nature was usually held, that the imagination was too severely circumscribed.

Dr. Carson is Professor of American History at Grove City College, Pennsylvania. Among his earlier writings in THE FREEMAN were his series on *The Fateful Turn* and *The American Tradition*, both of which are now available as books.

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This may well have been the case. But if the point needed making, it has been made a thousand times over by now. Moreover, the matter need not detain us in this study. The limits of the imagination and the character of human nature are matters to be determined by reference to reality. They cannot be made by those engaged in a flight from reality, nor are such things simply a matter of striking a nice balance between opposing views. Anyone who believes that a balance between opposing views bears any *necessary* relation to truth or right is already far along on his flight.

My major point is that philosophy disciplined thought and required thinkers continually to refer their ideas to reality. In these circumstances, reality was the main obstacle to reform, as it always is in fact so far as ameliorative reforms by government are concerned, and such reformers as there were had to keep their programs modest or make it clear that they were simply constructing romances.

By focusing upon an enduring reality, philosophers built an imposing amount of knowledge over the centuries. This movement came to its climax, to the present, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The central insights of this Western tradition of philosophy, to review them, were: (1) there is an order in the universe; (2) this order is rational; (3) reality is objective – that is, exists outside the mind; (4) cause and effect operate in the universe and are inseparably linked together; (5) everything has a nature that is fixed and immutable; and (6) men do not create; instead, they discover, represent, reproduce, copy, and report. So long as these views held sway, the vision of pervasive reform was limited to recognized dreamers and romancers.

Philosophers Set the Lead

A great reversal has taken place. Today, reformist intellectuals have gained the upper hand virtually everywhere, though their tenure in many places is probably precarious. They hold sway, and they press for continuous reform in virtually every area of life. A great many developments preceded this triumph. One of the most essential of these was the cutting loose from reality.

The way was prepared for the departure from reality by accredited philosophers. Figuratively, we might even say that the launching pads were built by philosophers. This is not the same as saying that the men in question were no longer in touch with reality. Indeed, no such judgment

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is intended, and no critique is to be made of the philosophical speculations which prepared the way for the flight. It is doubtful that philosophers should be blamed for what other men make of their thought. At any rate, even as conceptions of the nature of man and the universe were being clarified and propounded, even as these conceptions were being used to buttress order in society and extend liberty – that is, in the midst of the eighteenth century – some philosophers began to cut the ground from under the conceptions. The most notable of these thinkers were George Berkeley, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant.

Berkeley Removed the Substance

Bishop Berkeley undermined the belief in the substantiality of reality. It was a common belief that there are substances such as we denominate wood, glass, iron, and so forth. These substances are called matter, in general terms. By a strict empirical approach, Berkeley demonstrated that we never actually experience any such substances. We see colors, hear sounds, smell odors, taste tastes, and feel hardness or softness. If material substances exist, they cannot be known by the senses. "What Berkeley was concerned to show," says one philosopher, "was that nothing exists independently of minds. He believed that people used the word 'matter' to designate such a supposed independent existent, and he proposed to show that this word, so used, was merely a meaningless noise to which nothing corresponds."[1] He argued that only that which can be known can exist, or that it must be known to exist.

But mind knows only ideas. If matter existed, it could not be known. To affirm something as existing but unknowable involved an unacceptable contradiction to Berkeley. Apparently, he was not really interested in proving that we are wrong in conceiving of substance. Rather, he was concerned to show that it depends for its existence upon our thinking it. As he said, "All the Choir of Heaven and the furniture of earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have no substance without a mind."[2] The objectivity of reality tended to diminish to the vanishing point when this view was accepted.

Cause and Effect Denied by Hume

David Hume, radical empiricist and philosophical skeptic, challenged, among other things, the

[1] W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), p. 753.

[2] Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 758.

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conception of necessary causality. Traditionally, effect was said to follow cause of necessity, that is, cause and effect are linked in such a way that they *must* happen in conjunction. One text describes Hume's reasoning in the following way:

> But now Hume asks, how have we arrived at this idea of necessary causality? To what actual experiences or impressions does this idea correspond? The ideas of cause and effect, he replied, are derived from nothing more than our experience of linking two events, one of which immediately precedes the other in time. That which comes first is known as the cause and that which follows is called the effect. . . . Nowhere do I find the *impression* of a *necessary relation* between the two. Where, then, does the idea of causal necessity come from? The answer is that it is based upon psychological habit.[3]

Hume no more disproved the operation of cause and effect than Berkeley disproved the existence of substance, but he did attempt to indicate that the basis of the belief in cause and effect is psychological rather than simply empirical. Moreover, he cast doubt upon the uniformity and regularity of its operation.

[3] Eugene G. Bewkes, J. Calvin Keene, *et al.*, *The Western Heritage of Faith and Reason* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 574.

It might be well to add that Berkeley and Hume had done little, if any, more than to demonstrate the limits of simple empiricism. By so doing, they were showing the weakness of Locke's psychology and perhaps some of Descartes' assumptions. Since these latter may have been aberrations from the Western tradition, as some philosophers think, the assault might have done nothing more than to turn thought back into the mainstream. It did not, at least for most thinkers. The centuries-long assault upon Aristotle and the Schoolmen had borne fruit: they were discredited. Moreover, the Moderns were too proud of their achievements to repudiate them in the face of philosophical difficulties.

Ties Between Reason and Reality Severed by Kant

Instead of returning to the mainstream of Western thought, then, most thinkers continued on the journey away from it. The central figure for this further shift was Immanuel Kant. Thought has followed divergent paths since the time of Kant, and most of these directions were made possible, if not tenable, by what he did to philosophy. Kant severed some of the major ties between reason and reality; this operation very nearly killed meta-

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physics.[4] More specifically, he dealt with the questions which Berkeley and Hume, among others, had raised, that is, the question of validating empirically derived data. Kant believed that scientists were accumulating knowledge, that this was much more certain than Hume's skepticism would allow. Yet he accepted the views that knowledge is mind-dependent and that the senses bring us much less information than they appear to do. It turns out, by Kant's exposition, that the mind is equipped with categories – notably of time and space – which enable it to arrive at knowledge with the help of data.

This is most convenient for the scientist, but, having affirmed the central role of the mind, would Kant not go further and let the mind arrive at truth – via reason – independently of the senses? He would not. Such Pure Reason could not give us certain knowledge. All sorts of conceptions might be arrived at in this manner, but "these are conceptions the possibility of which has no ground to rest upon. For they are not based upon experience and its known laws; and without experience, they are merely arbitrary conjunction of thoughts, which, though containing no internal contradiction, has no claim to objective reality. . . . As far as concerns reality, it is self-evident that we cannot cogitate such a possibility . . . without the aid of experience; because *reality is concerned only with sensation*, as the matter of experience, and not with the form of thought, with which we can no doubt indulge in shaping fancies."[5]

Metaphysics Assigned Minor Role

Kant went on to maintain that we cannot attain certain knowledge of the soul, of the universe, or of God by the use of Pure Reason. They may exist, but reason does not certify this. Since no direct empirical evidence can be had of them, they cannot be rationally proved or disproved. The proper use of metaphysics, Kant maintained, is to do with it precisely what he had done, to reveal the categories or forms of knowledge, forms which are given such content as they have by experience.

In short, metaphysics seems to be relegated to the role of telling us how we know what we know we know. Even this role for meta-

[4] For an exposition of this development, see Etiene Gilson and Thomas Langan, *Modern Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 428-35.

[5] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, J. M. D. Meiklejohn, tr. (New York: Dutton, Everyman's Library, 1934), p. 168. Italics mine.

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physics is not certain (Kant is baffling and ambiguous, as usual), for he rules that empirical psychology should be separated from metaphysics,[6] and this could conceivably result in an empirical science of how knowledge is attained. This leaves metaphysics with the almost wholly negative role of being used to demonstrate the limits of reason. Kant suggests as much:

> That, as a purely speculative science, it is more useful in preventing error, than in the extension of knowledge, does not detract from its value; on the contrary, the supreme office of censor which it occupies, assures to it the highest authority and importance.[7]

If Kant be accepted, the only further use of metaphysics would be in the elucidation of Kant's ideas (a not inconsiderable task), since he has already used it fully in the way it can be used. In short, metaphysics could be relegated to the field of history of philosophy. In the main, this is what has happened.

A Substitute for Reason

What Kant took away with one hand – the Pure Reason – he returned with the other – Practical Reason. What we cannot know – that is, God, freedom, immortality, moral imperatives, principles, ideals – must be assumed. To accomplish this intellectual feat, Kant resorted to the traditional distinctions between appearance and reality. The phenomenal world, the world accessible to the senses, the only world that can be known, is only an appearance. The real world is unknown and unknowable, as Kant had earlier demonstrated to his satisfaction. Yet it must exist. No, that is not quite right. We must act *as if* it existed.

Kant affirmed the traditional morality, insisted upon the necessity of faith, and proclaimed that man participates in a moral order. Practically, Kant would have it, we do seem to know that there are moral imperatives. There may even be generally accepted beliefs about what many of these are. They can even be "proved" by the Practical Reason, by which Kant means reason operating upon assumptions about what reality must be like in order for appearances to be as we perceive them. Yet this kind of reason operates upon possibilities, not certainties, so far as philosophy is concerned. Kant said as much himself:

> It is just the same as if I sought to find out how freedom itself as causality of a will is possible; for, in so doing, I would leave the philosophical basis of explanation behind,

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 480.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 481.

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and I have no other. Certainly I could revel in the intelligible world, the world of intelligences, which still remains to me; but although I have a well founded idea of it, still I do not have the least knowledge of it, nor can I ever attain to it by all the exertions of my natural capacity of reasons.[8]

This stolid German, this resolute metaphysician, this determined moralist, had left the house of philosophy in ruins: of this there should be no doubt. Let us review the "achievement." Kant had changed the meaning of "objective" from something which exists outside the mind to make it refer to a property of mind itself; he had brought it into the interior world of consciousness.[9] He had taught that mind can only know phenomena. Reason can only deal with reason. Then he declares that phenomena is only appearance, that reality is unknown and unknowable.

Kant did try to put the house together again, or at least to build a shelter to protect the contents. This shelter appears to have been sustained only by the will and intellect of Kant. To put it another way, it was held together by the will to believe. When that was gone, the edifice collapsed. Since Kant could not bequeath to us the will to believe, he left us only the wreckage of philosophy. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the history of thought since his time has been largely the story of men picking up this or that piece of wreckage and trying to make a philosophy out of it.

Slow, but Inevitable

Several things need to be kept in mind in evaluating the impact of the deterioration of philosophy upon men and societies at large. First, any development in philosophy may wait a long while before it has any general consequences. Men, even most thinkers, tend to operate on the basis of received ideas, and these may be little altered in the course of a generation. Second, the generality of men do not know what philosophers are thinking and would probably think them demented if they did. Most men accept the reality of an objective universe outside themselves, are conscious of its resistance to their wills, know something of the rules by which one deals with it (at least so far as these rules have bearing upon their immediate tasks), accept cause and effect in the areas to which their immediate decisions reach, and are not apt to be

[8] Immanual Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Lewis W. Beck, tr. (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1959), p. 81.

[9] See Gilson and Langan, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

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much concerned about how they know what they know. Third, many of the major developments of the nineteenth century continued to rest upon traditional philosophical beliefs and the seventeenth and eighteenth century foundation. Thus, in the political realm the trend was toward constitutionalism, representative government, laissez-faire economy, the establishment of natural rights as civil liberties – all of which were based in earlier thought.

Yet the impact did come. It was felt first in the realm of thought itself, as thinkers diverged in virtually every direction from any unity. One intellectual historian, speaking of nineteenth century thought, says: "In the restless inquiry and searching that have marked men's intellectual pursuits since those days [eighteenth century], it is hard to find any . . . clear picture. Not only did men . . . fail to reach a measure of agreement on fundamentals; even within particular fields it is not easy to trace any simple line of development."[10]

Whatever explanations may be made of this phenomenon, one is central: the loss of the disciplinary role of philosophy. Kant had opened the door to every sort of doctrine or idea. It does not matter much that Kant had not intended such a result, or that he had labored mightily to divert men's minds in the direction he wanted them to go. (Let us not attribute too much to Kant. After all, Hume's skeptical work preceded his.) But if reason can deal only with reason, not with reality, why should men bother to test their ideas by reason? If Kant can decide what reality is while asserting that it cannot be finally proved that it is that way, why can't men imagine a reality of their own? After all, some men would not be enamored of Kant's moral universe. If the only knowledge that can be validated is that which comes by way of the senses, why not narrow the search for knowledge to empirical data? If no final proof can be offered for a transcendental realm, why assume that one exists? Why not simply accept the physical world for all there is? These are, indeed, some of the main directions that have been taken since the time of Kant. The flight from reality into melioristic reform was prepared for by these developments in thought. The position ascribed to Auguste Comte, quoted at the beginning of this piece, clearly follows the breakdown of philosophy.

But the concern here is with

[10] John H. Randall, Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954. rev. ed.), p. 389.

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the cutting loose from reality, not as yet with the flight from it. Developments in philosophy prepared the way for it, but the actual break occurred in specific work by thinkers. There were three major steps in the movement away from a fixed reality.

1. Abstract Rationalism

The first of these was the appearance of a widespread tendency to *abstract rationalism* among would-be intellectuals or thinkers. Abstract reason is reason cut loose from foundations. Reason must have a referent; it must be about something. Abstract rationalism occurs when someone employs reason without reference to that which is necessary to its valid use. If reason is to lead to any valid conclusions, it must do so in terms of some reality. That is, it must refer to some metaphysical or physical reality, and, in the case of social thought, it must be tied to the way things can and do happen. It should be obvious, then, that no one intends to reason abstractly, except possibly as an exercise in logic. There has been no conscious movement devoted to the use of abstract reason. Rather, its employment can be ascribed to ignorance, or, more kindly, to the failure to attend to reality.

There have been many varieties of usages of abstract rationalism. Perhaps the most common occurs when there is an attempt to apply a rational truth without regard to the concrete situation or to the temporal manner and order in which things can and do occur. Rationalists are most apt to fall into this error. Eighteenth century thinkers and actors, imbued as they were with rationalism, inclined to attend to the nature of things, were prone to this kind of behavior. Some of the best examples of abstract rationalism at work occurred during the French Revolution and its aftermath. The French National Assembly issued a decree in August of 1789 which opened with these words: "The National Assembly hereby completely abolishes the feudal system."[11] There follows a lengthy list particularizing what was abolished. The character of many of these provisions is illustrated by the following example:

> Inasmuch as a national constitution and public liberty are of more advantage to the provinces than the privileges which some of these enjoy, and inasmuch as the surrender of such privileges is essential to the intimate union of all parts of the realm, it is decreed that all the peculiar privileges, pecuniary or otherwise, of the provinces, principalities, districts, cantons, cities

[11] Eugen Weber, *The Western Tradition* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1959), p. 504.

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and communes, are once and for all abolished and are absorbed into the law common to all Frenchmen.[12]

Presumably, all local prerogatives were abolished by one stroke of the pen. To fill the vacuum created by the abolition of exceedingly complex and tangled relations, the Assembly proceeded to issue, a few days later, a general statement of the new political relationships which should prevail. The abstractness of some of the principles is astounding. For example:

> The source of sovereignty is essentially in the nation; no body, no individual can exercise authority that does not proceed from it in plain terms.[13]

Does this mean that parents shall not exercise authority over their children until the nation authorizes them to do so? Possibly not, but who could say? At any rate, catastrophe followed.

It might be supposed that the French leaders had not taken sufficient care in defining their principles. Even so, the matter cuts deeper than that. Another example may reveal the deeper dimensions of the problem of abstract rationalism. Napoleon sent the following message to his appointee as king of Westphalia in 1807:

> You will find enclosed the constitution of your kingdom. . . . You must faithfully observe it. . . .[14]

Napoleon had caused to be drawn up a Constitution for a kingdom and sent it along to be observed. There had been no examination of the concrete situation, nor was there any consultation of the peoples involved. There was a logic behind this action. Human nature is everywhere the same. Natural law is universally applicable. Why not draw up a code for everyone? Though they may not, must not, be obvious to rationalists, there are many reasons why this should not be attempted. In the first place, it is both superfluous and ridiculous to *enact* natural laws. Natural laws operate just the same, and universally, whether they are enacted or not. Moreover, natural laws are of the nature of principles, not of laws passed by legislatures. These principles may *inform* human acts, but acts are particular things, and they must be if they are to be enforced by courts. Second, positive law must be cast in terms of the language, the customs, the institutions, the procedures, even the beliefs, of the peoples involved. If they are not,

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 506.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 507.

[14] Quoted in R. R. Palmer with Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2nd ed. rev., 1958), p. 392.

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they will either wreak havoc or be of no effect, or a combination of both.

Reason, engaged in constructing programs, must be informed by the concrete situation, else it becomes abstract rationalism. There have been many other kinds of abstract rationalism. They cannot be explored in detail here, though some of them crop up in historical exposition elsewhere in this work, but they can at least be named. Abstract rationalism occurs when anyone attempts to maintain that reality is restricted to that which can be known by reason. For example, some have denied the reality of altruism; it is, they say, only a mask under which self-interest is hidden. Self-interest can be rationally explained, so they claim, and there is no need to posit altruism to aid in explanation. Reason has been extended beyond its legitimate function and by so doing it has been made abstract.

Another abuse which may be ascribed to abstract rationalism is the raising of temporary phenomena to the level of universal truths. This results from failing to distinguish between the enduring and the changing. Rationalists are prone to this fallacy. A good example of this is T. R. Malthus' formulation of exact laws of population increase and the increase of the means of subsistence. To wit:

> It may safely be pronounced that the population, when unchecked, goes on doubling itself every twenty-five years, or increases in a geometrical ratio. . . .
>
> [T]he means of subsistence, under circumstances the most favorable to human industry, could not possibly be made to increase faster than in an arithmetical ratio.[15]

If these "laws" have any other referent than the recent history of England, it does not appear. Perhaps the most common variety of abstract rationalism in intellectual circles is the effort to impose a theoretical system upon reality. This results from what may be a laudable attempt to find the common denominator in a mass of phenomena. Numerous instances of this have occurred in the case of historians applying Marx's class struggle theory to history.

Abstract reason, then, is reason cut loose from reality. Rationalists may have ever been inclined or have tended to extend the use of reason beyond its proper sphere. But this was greatly aggravated from the early nineteenth century on by the state of philosophy. Kant used the Pure Reason to reduce the sphere of reason to a purely formal role. But then he used the Practical Reason to affirm

[15] Quoted in Louis L. Snyder, *The Age of Reason* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, Anvil Book, 1955), pp. 150-51.

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what could not be arrived at by reason. The impact of this was to leave "rationalism" unchecked by reason. This allowed such thinkers as Auguste Comte, and later Karl Marx, to produce and propagate their "rational" systems without being subjected to the traditional philosophical checks.

2. *Imagination*

A second development in cutting loose from reality occurred by way of the Romantic emphasis upon *imagination*. Romanticism was a conscious movement, more or less, which had its hey-day in Europe in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. Just as most of the paths which modern thought has taken converge on Kant as their starting point, so romanticism was the spirit or medium in which this thought was developed. There is a vagueness about the thought of Romantics which extended study does little to dispel. Romanticism was a protest, in part, against the Age of Reason, and Romantics tended to exalt the imagination. In consequence, virtually every sort of idea might be advanced and seriously considered.

My purpose, however, is to call attention to a facet of romanticism only, not to make a general description or evaluation of it as a movement. The facet which concerns us has to do with the impetus it gave to the cutting loose from reality. This was mainly by way of the emphasis upon imagination, and its unfettered use.

The philosophical background to this is quite relevant. David Hume, with his radical empiricist approach to knowledge, had shown that we get only bits and pieces — fragments — of information from the senses. Thus, though we have a clear idea of a house, for example, we have never seen a house all at once. We can see part of it at a glance, but to see more we have to shift our perspective; when we do that, we lose sight of the part we saw earlier. Our idea of a house, then, must consist of more than sense impressions; it must have been developed by the imagination. Hume moved the imagination to a central position for philosophical consideration. Berkeley had already maintained that all ideas are mind-dependent. Kant claimed that knowledge is possible because of categories in the mind, went further and moved objectivity into the mind.

We can leave the philosophers at this point, for they were still somewhat disciplined in their speculations. Others were not. They found in these new theories a license to use the imagination at will. More, some returned to faith and idealism after the demise of

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reason; they felt not only free to use the imagination without stint but a call to do so. The free and extended use of the imagination was the way to the highest truths.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American, may be used to stand for those who thought in this way. In his tribute to "The Poet," Emerson gives unstinted praise to the unrestricted use of the imagination:

> The poets are thus liberating gods. . . . An imaginative book renders us much more service at first, by stimulating us through its tropes, than afterward when we arrive at the precise sense of the author. I think nothing is of any value in books excepting the transcendental and extraordinary. If a man is inflamed and carried away by his thought, to that degree that he forgets the authors and the public and heeds only this one dream which holds him like an insanity, let me read his paper, and you may have all the arguments and histories and criticisms. . . . Therefore we love the poet, the inventor, who in any form, whether in an ode or in an action or in looks and behavior, has yielded us a new thought. He unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene.
>
> The emancipation is dear to all men, and the power to impart it, as it must come from greater depth and scope of thought, is a measure of intellect. Therefore all books of the imagination endure, all which ascend to that truth that the writer sees nature beneath him, and uses it as his exponent. Every verse or sentence possessing this virtue will take care of its own immortality. The religions of the world are the ejaculations of a few imaginative men.[16]

Romantics, then, were cutting loose from reality by way of the imagination. Man might not yet be a god, though Emerson uses the word to describe the work of the poet, but he was almost certainly a demigod. Perhaps he did not yet create his own reality, but if he did, would he not have reached even greater imaginative heights? In the exaltation of mood, feeling, emotion, what vulgarity it would be to hold the imagination to mundane reality!

3. *Darwinian Evolution*

The third movement culminated in the triumph of Darwinian evolution. This marked the definitive break with an enduring reality and an almost exclusive focus upon change. The cynic might observe that the circle of philosophy had been completed. From Heraclitus in Ancient Greece to Charles Darwin in the England of the latter part of the nineteenth century was a long time and a considerable

[16] Ralph W. Emerson, "The Poet," *Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Greystone Press, n. d.), p. 137.

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distance, but reality had once again been located in the flux of change. The way had been prepared for Darwin in philosophy. G. W. F. Hegel had located reality in certain ideas at work in history, had made growth and development the center of attention, and had made of the dialectic the process by which historical change took place. Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher, had elaborated a philosophy embracing the evolution of societies. Auguste Comte, the French social planner, had reduced the development of man to three stages. Karl Marx was already busily inverting Hegel to make the class struggle which arises out of the control of the instruments of production the moving force in history, rather than ideas. It remained for Charles Darwin to give scientific sanction to the philosophy of change.

Actually, Darwin did much more. He brought man into the stream of evolution, denied the fixity of the species, and proposed particular theories that would account for change, or so he hoped. He collected a great deal of material with which he buttressed his generalizations. Above all, his work served as a base for the popularizations of evolution.

By that time, the attention of thinkers had been drawn almost entirely away from trying to discover an enduring reality. They were no longer looking for the nature of things. They were no longer describing an enduring order but rather seeking for the order or sources of changes. The quest for natural laws, so far as it survived, was turned toward discovering the laws of growth and development. Thought had moved from eternity into time, and men began to locate "reality" in the future. They had cut loose from reality and embarked on the strange journey into the unknown and the unknowable—unknowable, at least, until they get there, though it is not at all clear how they would know when they had arrived.

Even before all this had occurred, however, some men were becoming increasingly enamored of the visions of the better world they thought they could create. The imagination could conceive of a better world. Abstract rationalism could be used to give a "scientific" or "philosophical" gloss to their visions. They were sufficiently cut loose from reality to believe that they could make a better social world, and they "set about the betterment of man's condition." ◈

The next article in this series will treat of "The Utopian Vision."

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the Moral and Mysterious

HENRY HAZLITT'S *The Foundations of Morality* (Van Nostrand, $9.95) is an ambitious attempt to ground a system of ethics in the pragmatic necessities of daily life. The book, which is in the great line of utilitarian thinking that comes down from Hume, Adam Smith, and Bentham, is lucid, persuasive, and soundly argued; and in a nonreligious age one can only hope that Mr. Hazlitt will succeed in converting those who insist that the claims of morality are purely relative to the moment and subject to change without notice.

But if Mr. Hazlitt takes us a good distance, it should also be said that he doesn't reach the end of the road. My own fundamental objection to Mr. Hazlitt's reasoning is that he refuses to admit that he, too, makes a few assumptions, or value judgments, that are intuitive. In his own way he is just as mystical, say, as Albert Schweitzer, or any of the philosophers of natural law whom he chides in ever so gentle terms.

Before going into the subject of intuitive assumptions, however, one must pay tribute to Mr. Hazlitt's refinement of the grosser view of Bentham's "pleasure-pain" explanation of ethics. He thinks Carlyle did Bentham a great disservice in calling Benthamism the "pig philosophy." To get around Carlyle, Mr. Hazlitt says, "It seems the part of practical wisdom, and the best way to minimize misunderstanding, to use the terms 'pleasure' and 'pain' very sparingly, if not to abandon them almost altogether in ethical discussion." The terms confuse everybody by bringing up visions of the rewards and penalties of purely carnal pleasure. What Bentham was really talking about, according to Hazlitt, was "happiness as an aggregate," which could, of course, include a good deal of denial of short-run pleasures in order to create the basis for long-term satisfactions.

Prudence, benevolence, social cooperation, and altruism all find a place in Mr. Hazlitt's refined utilitarianism, for they all help to create a livable community. If Mr. Hazlitt remains an unreconstructed believer in competitive capitalism, it is because he thinks economic

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competition between separate business units is the only really workable way of inducing people to cooperate to the end of raising the standard of living. This isn't a paradox, for the competitive spirit is what hones any team to the supreme cooperative effort.

Capitalist vs. Socialist Ethics

The most telling chapters in Mr. Hazlitt's book are those on the ethics of capitalism versus the ethics of socialism. Capitalism, he says, is not "ethically indifferent," or "ethically neutral," for it depends on voluntary social cooperation through mutually beneficial exchanges. Quoting Murray Rothbard, Hazlitt insists that in a system of beneficial exchanges one man's gain is necessarily another man's gain. The system naturally develops more practical social sympathy than any other, even though some capitalists may be mighty egoists.

In any case, it is socialism, not capitalism, that emphasizes the jungle competition of tooth and claw. The discipline of competition between units disappears, and men cut each other's throats in the scramble for preferment within the one big unit of the state. "Office politics" under communism are magnified beyond belief. Socialism means coercion of the individual, and he who does not obey does not eat. Naturally, a great majority of men become sly malingerers under such a system. And, as Hayek said long ago in *The Road to Serfdom,* in a system that depends on coercion, the "worst get on top."

Hazlitt, following Hume, makes the point that no society can be happy if its citizens are not willing to abide by general rules. It may seem cruel to apply the principle of "equality before the law" to a man who steals because he is in need, but if individuals are to become the judges of their own need a society must thereby become a jungle of distrust. When judges and juries begin to exercise too much compassion, delinquency grows by leaps and bounds.

Somewhere, A Premise

Most of Mr. Hazlitt's book comes under the heading of eloquently expressed common sense. But when he comes to discuss such things as intuitionism and natural law he reminds me of the psychologists who organized a valiant crusade to kill the word "soul" and ended up by substituting for it the word "psyche," which, like the "soul," is also an impalpable thing that nobody has yet succeeded in situating in any specific part of the human anatomy. Besides, as Chesterton said,

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"psyche" means "soul" in Greek. Mr. Hazlitt thinks that the term "natural rights" is unfortunate in that it has helped to perpetuate a "mystique" which regards rights as having existed since the beginning of time. But he is willing to accept the "concept" of natural rights as long as it is understood to mean "ideal rights," or the "legal rights that every man ought to enjoy."

It is at this point that one becomes aware of Mr. Hazlitt's own dependence on the Schweitzer intuition that human life is, or should be, held sacred, not because of any utilitarian reason connected with the "greatest happiness of the greatest number," but for reasons that can only be called religious. Under a cannibal system, the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" could be mathematically fixed at the point where a majority would be consuming a minority without leading to the extinction of the species. But this would not be "right" even though it might be called "rational." One has to fall back on intuitive assumption at some point in the discussion of rights, which is not a pleasant predicament for anyone who believes in the supremacy of reason. Yet there it is, and I, for one, find it less offensive to accept certain truths as "self-evident" gifts of a Creator than I do to make no assumptions at all.

For the fact is that every human being who abstains from suicide proceeds on the assumption that life is worth living, which in itself is not susceptible of "proof" in any scientific sense of the word. One lives, one accepts the Schweitzerian intuition of the sacred value of one's own body and soul (or psyche), just as one accepts the facts of digestion, blood pressure, reproduction, and a lot of other things. There is no need to try to "ground" the perception of "natural right" in anything; it is simply there.

From this initial assumption the whole doctrine of "natural rights" flows. If one has a right to life, one has rights to liberty and property as the necessary means to sustaining life.

A Starting Point

Without the first assumption of human life as a sacred gift from a Creator (whatever or whoever the Creator may be), Mr. Hazlitt's chosen economic system becomes a purely arbitrary thing. Why, indeed, should a Soviet commissar give up his post of power merely to satisfy the craving of a peasant for his own plot of ground unless the peasant has rights to control his own life? There is no reason why the strong

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should not oppress the weak if the right to life is not "self-evident," i.e., beyond the necessity of proof in a scientific sense.

These are deep waters, and I don't feel comfortable when trying to navigate them. Nobody ever spoke to me out of a burning bush, so I have to take the felt conviction of a basic right to life on intuitive trust. But there is no sense denying that existence is rooted in mystery. My only objection to Mr. Hazlitt's book is that it does not make enough allowance for mystery. He tries to put the Deity in a hole by propounding a conundrum: Is a thing right because God wills it, or does God will it because it is right? Now it is entirely possible that, as the Deity sees it, the very formulation of such a conundrum proceeds from a deficiency in the human ability to penetrate mystery. Cats can't do algebra, the amoeba can't think as a cat – and why should human beings at this particular stage in evolution be expected to know everything? ◈

▸ THE OTHER AMERICA: *Poverty in the United States* by Michael Harrington (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 203 pp. 95¢.

Reviewed by Edmund A. Opitz

THE FIRST THING to do with poor people, Tolstoy said, is get off their backs. This, the very government which has declared war on poverty, is not doing. The new official poverty line for a family is drawn at somewhere around $3,000 a year. Yet, a couple without dependents who earn this much money are forced by the national government to pay an income tax of roughly $300. Not to mention local and state levies, plus the hidden taxes on every item purchased!

Poverty in a society is overcome by productivity, and in no other way. There is no political alchemy which can transmute diminished production into increased consumption. Government interventions into economic life can redistribute goods by taxing everyone and subsidizing a few, taking money out of the pockets of some and putting it into the pockets of others. But, obviously, no such scheme can elevate the *general* welfare. The economic welfare of all can be raised only by removing artificial (usually political) impediments from wealth production. More can be consumed only if more is produced.

Men have been freer to produce up to individual capacity in American society, historically, than in any other society, and our affluence, as a result, is the envy of the world. Hindsight tells us that we might have done even better if our statutes had per-

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mitted as much economic freedom as we said we believed in. Actually there has been much anti-economic legislation since 1789, but it was not till a generation ago that we began cutting our economic throat on principle. To the extent that the politically inspired "war on poverty" succeeds, it will be that much harder for poor people to improve their economic circumstances.

According to Mr. Harrington, about a fourth of our nation lives on Tobacco Road; between forty and fifty million Americans are "maimed in body and spirit." "The poor," in his view, constitute almost a separate species, to be analyzed and acted upon politically, i.e., impersonally.

An ideological passion to change the structures of American society informs this book. It would eliminate the free market economy as well as Constitutional guarantees of liberty which preserve individual and social sectors of immunity against governmental power. This would not help the poor, and it would hurt everyone. Mr. Harrington declares (p. 17) that the welfare state which arose in the thirties "helped the poor least of all." His super state welfarism would be more of the same, and worse. This is why we must oppose him. Political liberty, the Rule of Law, and the free market are the hallmarks of a free society; and only a truly free society, with its ethical and religious principles in working order, can resolve the problem of poverty. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Confused Thinking

OUR DIFFICULTY lies not so much with obnoxious Communists in our midst as with the fuzzy-minded people who think we can have totalitarian economics in the hands of bureaucracy, and at the same time to have personal liberty. . . . Their confused thinking convinces them that they are liberals – but if they are liberals, they have liberalism without liberty. Nor are they middle-of-the-roaders as they claim to be: They are a half-way house to totalitarianism.

HERBERT HOOVER, before the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, June 22, 1948

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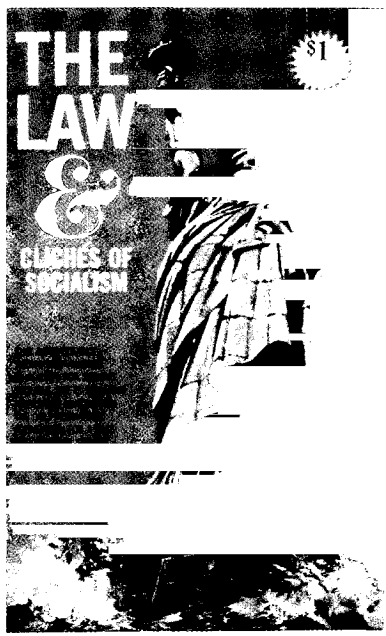

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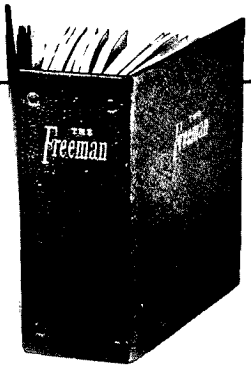

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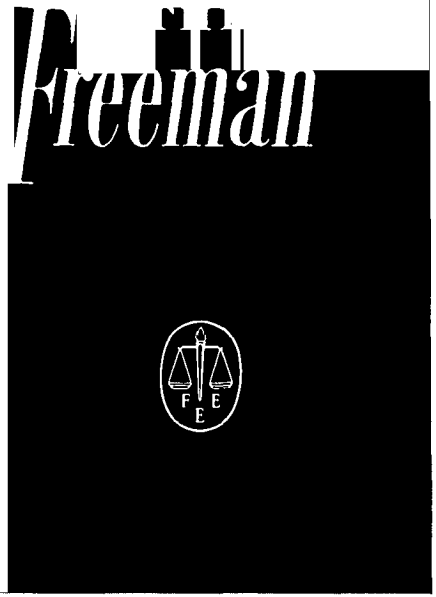

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■ Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society — the farmers, mechanics, and laborers — who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government. There are no necessary evils in government. Its evils exist only in its abuses. If it would confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing.

ANDREW JACKSON, from a Veto Message of July 10, 1832

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